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GOOD LUCK

Jerry Albert

23 MARCH 1974

A

PRACTICAL COMMENTARY

UPON

THE FIRST EPISTLE GENERAL

OF

SAINT PETER.

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FIRST EPISTLE GENERAL OF SAINT PETER.

CHAPTER III.

Ver. 1. Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives.

THE "tabernacle of the sun," Psa. xix. 4, is set high in the heavens; but it is so, that it may have influence below upon the earth. And the word of God, which is spoken of there immediately after, as being in many ways like it, holds resemblance in this particular: it is a sublime, heavenly light, and yet descends, in its use, to the lives of men, in the variety of their stations, to warm and to enlighten, to regulate their affections and actions in whatsoever course of life they are called to. By a perfect revolution or circuit, as there it is said of the sun, it visits all ranks and estates; "its going forth is from the end of heaven, and its circuit unto the ends of it, and there is nothing hid from the heat of it;" it disdains not to teach the very servants, in their low condition and employments, how to behave themselves, and sets before them no meaner example than that of Jesus Christ, which is the highest of all examples. So here, the apostle proceeds to give rules

adapted to that relation which is the main one in families, that of husbands and wives. As for the order, it is indifferent; yet, possibly, he begins here at the duties of wives, because his former rules were given to inferiors, to subjects and servants; and the duty he commends particularly here to them, is, subjection; "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection," &c.

After men have said all they can, and much, it may be, to little purpose, in running the parallel between these two estates of life, marriage and celibacy, the result will be found, I conceive, all things being truly estimated, very little odds, even in natural respects, in the things themselves, saving only as the particular condition of persons, and the hand of Divine providence, turn the balance the one way or the other. The writing of satires against either, or panegyrics on the one in prejudice of the other, is but a caprice of men's minds, according to their own humour; but in respect of religion, the apostle, having scanned the subject to the full, leaves it indifferent, only requiring in those who are so engaged, hearts as disengaged as may be, that they that marry be as if they married not, &c., 1 Cor. vii. 29, 31. Within a while, it will be all one; as he adds that grave reason, "For the fashion (σχήμα) of this world passeth"—it is but a pageant, a show of an hour long, (παράγει,) "goes by," and is no more seen. Thus, the great pomps and solemnities of marriages of kings and princes, in former times, where are they? Oh! how unseemly is it to have an immortal soul drowned in the esteem and affection of any thing that perishes, and to be cold and indifferent in seeking after a good that will last as long as itself! Aspire to that good which is the only

match for the soul, that close union with God which cannot be dissolved, which he calls an everlasting marriage, Hos. ii. 19, that will make you happy, either with the other, or without it. All the happiness of the most excellent persons, and the very top of all affection and prosperity meeting in human marriages, are but a dark and weak representation of the solid joy which is in that mysterious Divine union of the spirit of man with the "Father of Spirits," from whom it issues. But this by the way.

The common spring of all mutual duties, on both sides, must be supposed to be love; that peculiar conjugal love which makes them one, will infuse such sweetness into the authority of the husband and the obedience of the wife, as will make their lives harmonious, like the sound of a well-tuned instrument; whereas without that, having such a universal conjuncture of interest in all their affairs, they cannot escape frequent contests and discords, which is a sound more unpleasant than the jarring of untuned strings to an exact ear. And this should be considered in the choice, that it be not, as it is too often, which causeth so many domestic ills, contracted only as a bargain of outward advantages, but as union of hearts. And where this is not, and there is something wanting in this point of affection, there, if the parties, or either of them, have any saving knowledge of God, and access to him in prayer, they will be earnest suitors for his help in this, that his hand may set right what no other can; that he who is love itself, may infuse that mutual love into their hearts now, which they should have sought sooner. And certainly, they who sensibly want this, and yet seek it not of him, what wonder is it, though they find much bitterness and discontent? Yea, where

they agree, if it be only in natural affection, their observance of the duties required, is not by far either so comfortable and pleasing, or so sure and lasting, as when it ariseth from a religious and Christian love in both, which will cover many failings, and take things by the best side.

Love is the prime duty in both, the basis of all; but because the particular character of it, as proper to the wife, is conjugal obedience and subjection, therefore that is usually specified, as "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord," Eph. v. 22, so here. Now, if it be such obedience as ought to arise from a special kind of love, then the wife would remember this, that it must not be constrained, uncheerful obedience: and the husband would remember, that he ought not to require base and servile obedience; for both these are contrary to that love, whereof this obedience must carry the true tincture and relish, as flowing from it; there all will hold right, where love commands, and love obeys.

This subjection, as all other, is qualified thus, that it be "in the Lord." His authority is primitive, and binds first, and all others have their patents and privileges from him; therefore he is supremely and absolutely to be observed in all. If the husband would draw the wife to an irreligious course of life, he is not to be followed in this, but in all things indifferent, this obedience must hold; which yet forbids not a modest advice and representation to the husband, of that which is more convenient, but that done, a submissive yielding to the husband's will is the suiting of this rule. Yea, possibly the husband may not only imprudently, but unlawfully will that which, if not in its own nature a thing unlawful,

the wife by reason of his will may obey lawfully, yea, could not lawfully disobey.

Now, though this subjection was a fundamental law of pure nature, and came from that hand which made all things in perfect order, yet sin, which hath embittered all human things with a curse, hath disrelished this subjection, and made it taste somewhat of a punishment, Gen. iii. 16; and that as a suitable punishment of the woman's abuse of the power she had with the man, to the drawing of him to disobedience against God.

The bitterness in this subjection arises from the corruption of nature in both: in the wife a perverse desire rather to command, or at least a repining discontent at the obligation to obey; and this is increased by the disorder, and imprudence, and harshness of husbands, in the use of their authority.

But in a Christian, the conscience of Divine appointment will carry it, and weigh down all difficulties; for the wife considers her station, that she is set in it, ὑποτασσομέναι, it is the rank the Lord's hand hath placed her in, and therefore she will not break it: from respect and love to him, she can digest much frowardness in a husband, and make that her patient subjection, a sacrifice to God: Lord, I offer this to thee, and for thy sake I humbly bear it.

The worth and love of a husband may cause that respect, where this rule moves not; but the Christian wife who hath love to God, though her husband be not so comely, nor so wise, nor any way so amiable, as many others, yet, because he is her own husband, and because of the Lord's command in the general, and his providence in the particular disposal of his own, therefore she loves and obeys.

"That if any obey not the word." This supposes a particular case, and applies the rule to it, taking it for granted that a believing wife will cheerfully observe and respect a believing husband, but if he is an unbeliever, yet that unties not this engagement; yea, there is something in this case which presses it and binds it the more, a singular good which probably may follow upon obeying such. By "that good conversation," they may be gained, who believe not the word: not that they could be fully converted without the word, but having a prejudice against the word, that may be removed by the carriage of a believing wife, and they may be somewhat mollified, and prepared, and induced to hearken to religion, and take it into consideration.

This gives not Christians a warrant to draw on themselves this task, and make themselves this work, by choosing to be joined to an unbeliever, either a profane or merely an unconverted husband or wife; but teacheth them, being so matched, what should be their great desire, and their suitable carriage in order to the attainment of it. And in the primitive Christian times this fell out often: by the gospel preached, the husband might be converted from gross infidelity, Judaism, or Paganism, and not the wife; or the wife, which is the supposition here, and not the husband; and then came in the use of this consideration.

And this is the freedom of Divine grace, to pick and choose where it will, one of a family, or two of a tribe, as the prophet hath it, Jer. iii. 14; and according to our Saviour's word, two in one bed, the one taken, and the other left, Luke xvii. 34; some selected ones in a congregation, or, in a house, a child, possibly, or servant, or wife, while it leaves

the rest. The apostle seems to imply particularly, that there were many instances of this, wives being converts, and their husbands unbelieving. We can determine nothing as to their conjecture, who think that there will be more of that sex, here called the "weaker vessels," than of the other, who shall be vessels of honour, which God seasons with grace here, and hereafter will fill with glory; but this is clear, that many of them are converted, while many men, and divers of them very wise and learned men, having the same or far greater means and opportunities, do perish in unbelief. This, I say, evidences the liberty and the power of the Spirit of God, that "wind that bloweth where it listeth;" and withal it suits with that word of the apostle, that the Lord this way abases those things which men account so much of, "and hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty," 1 Cor. i. 26. Nor doth the pliableness and tenderness of their affections (though grace, once wrought, may make good use of that) make their conversion easier, but the harder rather; for through nature's corruption, they would by that be led to yield more to evil than to good; but the efficacy of grace appears much in establishing their hearts in the love of God, and in making them, when once possessed with that, to be inflexible and invincible by the temptations of the world, and the strength and sleights of Satan.

That which is here said of "their conversation," holds of the husband in the like case, and of friends and kindred, and generally of all Christians, in reference to those with whom they converse; that their spotless, holy carriage as Christians, and in their particular stations, as Christian husbands, or wives, or friends, is a very likely and hopeful means

of converting others who believe not. Men who are prejudiced, observe actions a great deal more than words. In those first times especially, the blameless carriage of Christians did much to the increasing of their number.

Strive, ye wives, and others, to adorn and commend the religion you profess to others, especially those nearest you, who are averse. Give no just cause of scandal and prejudice against religion. Beware not only of gross failings and ways of sin, but of such imprudences as may expose you and your profession. Study both a holy and a wise carriage, and pray much for it. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him," James i. 5.

But if wives and other private Christians be thus obliged, how much more the ministers of the word! Oh! that we could remember our deep obligations to holiness of life! It has been rightly said, "Either teach none, or let your life teach too." *Cohelleth, anima concionatrix*—"The preaching soul, must the preacher be," Eccl. i. 1; the word of life springing from inward affection, and then, *vita concionatrix*—"The preaching life." The Sunday's sermon lasts but an hour or two, but holiness of life is a continued sermon all the week long.

"They also without the word may be won." The conversion of a soul is an inestimable gain; it is a high trading and design to go about it. Oh! the precious soul, but how undervalued by most! Will we believe him who knew well the price of it, for he paid it, that the whole visible world is not worth one soul, the gaining of it all cannot countervail that loss? Matt. xvi. 26. This, wives, and husbands,

and parents, and friends, if themselves converted, should consider seriously, and apply themselves to pray much that their unconverted relations, in nature dead, may be enlivened, and that they may receive them from death; and they should esteem nothing, rest in no natural content or gain, without that, at least, without using incessant diligence in seeking it, and their utmost skill and pains. But above all, this is the peculiar task of ministers, as the apostle often repeats it of himself, that "unto the Jews" he "became as a Jew," that he might "gain the Jews," &c., 1 Cor. ix. 20. All gains on earth are base in comparison with this. *Me malè amando, me perdidi, et te solum quærendo et purè amando, me et te pariter inveni:* "By loving self amiss, myself I lost; by seeking thee, and singly, sincerely loving thee, at once myself and thee I found."—Thomas à Kempis. A soul converted is gained to itself, gained to the pastor, or friend, or wife, or husband, who sought it, and gained to Jesus Christ; added to his treasury, who thought not his own precious blood too dear to lay out for this gain.

Ver. 2. While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear.

As all graces are connected in their own nature, so it is altogether necessary that they be found in connexion for the end here propounded, the conversion of those who are strangers to religion, and possessed with false notions of it, and prejudices against it. It is not the regularity of some particular actions, nor the observance of some duties, that will serve; but it is an even, uniform frame of life that the apostle here teaches Christian wives, particularly in reference to this end, the gaining or

conversion of unbelieving husbands. And this we have both in that word, their conversation, which signifies the whole course and tract of their lives, and in the particular specifying of the several duties proper to that relation and state of life. 1. Subjection. 2. Chastity. 3. Fear. 4. Modesty in outward ornaments. 5. The inward ornaments of meekness and quietness of spirit.

The combination of these things makes up such a wife, and the exercise of them throughout her life makes up such a conversation, as adorns and commends the religion she professes, and is a fit, and may be a successful means of converting the husband who as yet professes it not.

"Chaste conversation." It is the proper character of a Christian, to study purity in all things, as the word ἁγνὴν in its extent signifies. Let the world turn that to a reproach, call them as you will, this is sure, that none have less fancy and presumption of purity, than those who have most desire of it. But the particular pureness here intended, is, as it is rendered, that of chastity, as the word is often taken; it being a grace that peculiarly deserves that name, as the sins contrary to it are usually and deservedly called uncleanness. It is the pure whiteness of the soul to be chaste, to abhor and disdain the swinish puddle of lust, than which there is nothing that doth more debase the excellent soul; nothing that more evidently draws it down below itself, and makes it truly brutish. The three kinds of chastity—virginal, conjugal, and vidual, are all of them acceptable to God, and suitable to the profession of a Christian: therefore, in general only, whatsoever be our condition in life, let us in that way conform to it, and follow the apostle's rule, possessing

these our earthen vessels, our bodies, in holiness and honour; (by which is there expressed this same chastity;) and this we shall do, if we rightly remember our calling as Christians, in what sort of life soever; as there he tells us, "God hath not called us to uncleanness, but to holiness," 1 Thess. iv. 7.

"With fear." Either a reverential respect to their husbands, or, the fear of God; whence flows best both that and all other observance, whether of conjugal or any other Christian duties. Be not presumptuous, as some, because you are chaste, but so contemper your conversation with a religious fear of God, that you dare not take liberty to offend him in any other thing, and, according to his institution, with a reverential fear of your husbands, shunning to offend them. But, possibly, this fear doth particularly relate to the other duty with which it is joined, "Chaste conversation with fear;" fearing the least stain of chastity, or the very least appearance of any thing not suiting with it. It is a delicate, timorous grace, afraid of the least air or shadow of any thing that hath but a resemblance of wronging it, in carriage, or speech, or apparel, as follows in the 3rd and 4th verses.

Ver. 3. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel;
4. But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.

That nothing may be wanting to the qualifying of a Christian wife, she is taught how to dress herself, supposing a general desire, but especially in that sex, of ornament and comeliness; the sex which

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began first our engagement to the necessity of clothing, having still a peculiar propensity to be curious in that, and to improve the necessity to an advantage.

The direction here given, corrects the misplacing of this diligence, and addresses it right; "Let it not be of the outward man, in plaiting," &c.

Our perverse, crooked hearts turn all we use into disorder. Those two necessities of our life, food and raiment, how few know the right measure and bounds of them! Unless poverty be our carver and cut us short, who, almost, is there, that is not bent to something excessive! Far more are beholden to the lowliness of their estate than to the lowliness of their mind, for sobriety in these things; and yet, some will not be so bounded neither, but will profusely lavish out upon trifles, to the sensible prejudice of their estate.

It is not my purpose, nor do I think it very needful, to debate many particulars of apparel and ornament of the body, their lawfulness or unlawfulness: only,

1. It is undoubted, that though clothing was first drawn on by necessity, yet, all regard of comeliness and ornament in apparel is not unlawful; nor doth the apostle's expression here, rightly considered, fasten that upon the adorning he here speaks of. He doth no more universally condemn the use of gold for ornament, than he doth any other comely raiment, which here he means by that general word of "putting on of apparel;" for his [not] is comparative,—not this adorning, but the ornament of a meek spirit, that rather, and as being much more comely and precious; as that known expression, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice."

2. According to the different place and quality of persons, there may be a difference in this: thus, the robes of judges and princes are not only for personal ornament, but because there is in them, especially to vulgar eyes, which seldom look deeper than the outside of things, there is, I say, in that apparel a representation of authority or majesty, which befits their place; and besides this, other persons who are not in public place, men, or women, (who are here particularly directed,) yet may have in this some mark of their rank; and in persons otherwise little distant, some allowance may be made for the habits and breeding of some beyond others, or the quality of their society, and those with whom they converse.

3. It is not impossible that there may be in some an affected pride in the meanness of apparel, and in others, under either neat or rich attire, a very humble, unaffected mind; using it upon some of the aforementioned engagements, or such like, and yet the heart not at all upon it. *Magnus qui fictilibus utitur tanquam argento; nec ille minor qui argento tanquam fictilibus*, says Seneca: "Great is he who enjoys his earthenware as if it were plate; and not less great is the man to whom all his plate is no more than earthenware."

4. It is as sure as any of these, that real excess and vanity in apparel will creep in, and will always willingly convey itself under the cloak of some of these honest and lawful considerations. This is a prime piece of our heart's deceit, not only to hold out fair pretences to others, but to put the trick upon ourselves, to make ourselves believe we are right and single-minded in those things wherein we are

directly serving our lusts, and feeding our own vanity.

5. To a sincere and humble Christian, very little either dispute or discourse concerning this will be needful. A tender conscience, and a heart purified from vanity, and weaned from the world, will be sure to regulate this, and all other things of this nature, after the safest manner, and will be wary, 1. Of lightness and fantastic garb in apparel, which is the very bush or sign hanging out, that tells a vain mind lodges within; and, 2. Of excessive costliness, which both argues and feeds the pride of the heart, and defrauds, if not others of their dues, yet, the poor of thy charity, which, in God's sight, is a due debt too. Far more comfort shalt thou have on thy death-bed, to remember that such a time, instead of putting lace on my own clothes, I helped a naked back to clothing, I abated somewhat of my former superfluities, to supply the poor's necessities—far sweeter will this be, than to remember that I could needlessly cast away many pounds to serve my pride, rather than give a penny to relieve the poor.

As conscientious Christians will not exceed in the thing itself, so, in as far as they use lawful ornament and comeliness, they will do it without bestowing much either of diligence or delight on the business.

To have the mind taken and pleased with such things, is so foolish and childish a thing, that if most might not find it in themselves, they would wonder at it in many others, of years and common sense. *Non bis pueri, sed semper:* "Not twice children, but always." And yet truly, it is a disease that few escape. It is strange upon how

poor things men and women will be vain, and think themselves somebody; not only upon some comeliness in their face or feature, which, though poor, is yet a part of themselves, but of things merely without them; that they are well lodged, or well mounted, or well apparelled, either richly, or well in fashion. Light empty minds are, like bladders, blown up with any thing. And they who perceive not this in themselves, are the most drowned in it; but such as have found it out, and abhor their own follies, are still hunting and following these in themselves, to beat them out of their hearts and to shame them from such fopperies. The soul, fallen from God, hath lost its true worth and beauty; and therefore it basely descends to these mean things, to serve and dress the body, and take share with it of its unworthy borrowed ornaments, while it hath lost and forgotten God, and seeks not after him, knows not that He alone is the beauty and ornament of the soul, Jer. ii. 32; his Spirit and the graces of it, its rich attire, as is here particularly specified in one excellent grace, and it holds true in the rest.

The apostle doth indeed expressly, on purpose, check and forbid vanity and excess in apparel, and excessive delight in lawful decorum, but his prime end is to recommend this other ornament of the soul, "the hidden man of the heart."

It is the thing the best philosophy aimed at, as some of their wisest men do express it, to reduce men, as much as may be, from their body to their soul; but this is the thing that true religion alone doth effectually and thoroughly, calling them off from the pampering and feeding of a morsel for the worms, to the nourishing of that immortal being infused into it, and directing them to the proper

nourishment of souls, the "Bread that came down from heaven," John vi. 27.

So here, the apostle pulls off from Christian women their vain outside ornaments; but is not this a wrong, to spoil all their dressing and fineness? No, he doth this only to send them to a better wardrobe: there is much profit in the change.

All the gold and other riches of the temple, prefigured the excellent graces of Christians: of Christ, indeed, first, as having all fulness in himself, and as furnishing it to them; but secondarily, of Christians, as the living temples of God. So, Psa. xlv. 13, the church is "all glorious," but it is "within." And the embroidery, the variety of graces, the lively colours of other graces, shine best on the dark ground of humility. Christ delights to give much ornament to his church, commends what she hath, and adds more. "Thy neck is comely with chains: we will make thee borders of gold," Cant. i. 10, 11.

The particular grace the apostle recommends, is particularly suitable to his subject in hand, the conjugal duty of wives; nothing so much adorning their whole carriage as this "meekness" and "quietness of spirit." But it is, withal, the comeliness of every Christian in every estate. It is not a woman's garment or ornament, improper for men. There is somewhat, as I may say, of a particular cut or fashion of it for wives towards their husbands, and in their domestic affairs; but men, all men ought to wear of the same stuff, yea, if I may so speak, of the same piece, for it is in all one and the same spirit, and fits the stoutest and greatest commanders. Moses was a great general, and yet not less great in this virtue, "the meekest man on earth."

Nothing is more uncomely in a wife than an un-

composed, turbulent spirit, that is put out of frame with every trifle, and inventive of false causes of disquietness and fretting to itself. And so in a husband, and in all, an unquiet, passionate mind lays itself naked, and discovers its own deformity to all. The greatest part of things that vex us, do so not from their own nature or weight, but from the unsettledness of our minds. *Multa nos offendunt quæ non lædunt:* "Many things offend us which do not hurt us." How comely is it to see a composed, firm mind and carriage, that is not lightly moved!

I urge not a stoical stupidity, but that in things which deserve sharp reproof, the mind keep in its own station and seat still, not shaken out of itself, as the most are; that the tongue utter not unseemly, rash words, nor the hand act any thing that discovers the mind hath lost its command for the time. But truly, the most know so ill how to use just anger upon just cause, that it is easier, and the safer extreme, not to be angry, but still calm and serene, as the upper region; not as the place of continual tempest and storms, as the most are. Let it pass for a kind of sheepishness to be meek; it is a likeness to Him who was as a sheep before the shearers, not opening his mouth; it is a portion of *his* Spirit. The apostle commends his exchange of ornaments, by two things.

1. This is incorruptible, and therefore fits an incorruptible soul. Your varieties of jewels and rich apparel are perishing things; you shall one day see a heap made of all, and that all on a flame. And in reference to yourselves, they perish sooner. When death strips you of your nearest garment, your flesh, all the others, which were but loose upper garments above it, must off too: it gets,

indeed, a covering to the grave, but the soul is left stark naked, if no other clothing be provided for it, for the body was but borrowed; then it is made bare of all. But spiritual ornaments, and this of humility and meekness amongst them, remain, and are incorruptible; they neither wear out, nor go out of fashion, but are still the better for the wearing, and shall last eternity, and shine there in full lustre. And,

2. Because the opinion of others is much regarded in matter of apparel, and it is mostly in respect to this that we use ornament in it, he tells us of the account in which this is held: men think it poor and mean, nothing more exposed to contempt than the spirit of meekness, it is mere folly with men:—that is no matter; this overweighs all their disesteem, "It is with God of great price;" and things are indeed as he values them, and no otherwise. Though it be not the country fashion, yet it is the fashion at court, yea, it is the king's own fashion, "Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart," Matt. xi. 29. Some who are court-bred, will send for the masters of fashions; though they live not in the court, and though the peasants think them strange dresses, yet they regard not that, but use them as finest and best. Care not what the world may say; you are not to stay long with them. Desire to have both fashions and stuffs from *court*, from heaven, this "spirit of meekness," and it shall be sent you. It is never right in any thing with us, till we attain to this, to tread on the opinion of men, and eye nothing but God's approbation.

Ver. 5. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands.

6. Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose

daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.

The apostle enforces his doctrine by example, the most compendious way of teaching. Hence, the right way to use the Scriptures, is, to regulate our manners by them; as by their precepts, so by their examples. And for this end it is that a great part of the Bible is historical. There is not in the saints a transmigration of souls, but there is, so to speak, a oneness of soul, they being in all ages partakers of the self-same Spirit. Hence, pious and obedient wives are here called the "daughters of Sarah." Such women are here designated as, 1. Holy; 2. Believing; 3. Firm and resolute; "not afraid with any amazement." Though by nature they are fearful, yet they are rendered of undaunted spirits, by a holy, clean, and pure conscience. Believing wives who fear God, are not terrified; their minds are established in a due obedience to God, and also towards their husbands.

Ver. 7. Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.

Your wives are subject to you, but you likewise are subject to this word, by which all ought, in all stations, to be directed, and by which, however, all shall one day be judged. And you are *alike* subject as they (ὁμοίως): parents as children, masters as servants, and kings as their subjects; all hold of a superior, and it is high treason against the majesty of God, for any, in any place of command, to dream of an unbounded absolute authority, in opposition to him.

A spirit of prudence, or "knowledge," particularly suitable and relating to this subject, is required as the light and rule by which the husband's whole economy and carriage is to be guided. It is required that he endeavour after that civil prudence for the ordering of his affairs which tends to the good of his family: but chiefly a pious, religious prudence, for regulating his mind and carriage as a Christian husband; that he study the rule of Scripture in this particular, which many do not, neither advising with it what they should do, nor laying it, by reflection, upon their past actions, examining by it what they have done. Now this is the great fault in all practical things: most know something of them, but inadvertency and inconsideration, our not ordering our ways by that light, is the thing that spoils all.

Knowledge is required in the wife, but more eminently in the husband, as the head, the proper seat of knowledge. It is possible that the wife may sometimes have the advantage of knowledge, either natural wit and judgment, or a great measure of understanding of spiritual things; but this still holds, that the husband is bound to improve the measure both of natural and of spiritual gifts, that he hath, or can attain to, and to apply them usefully to the ordering of his conjugal carriage, and that he understand himself obliged somewhat the more, in the very notion of a husband, both to seek after and to use that prudence which is peculiarly required for his due deportment. And a Christian wife, who is more largely endowed, yet will show all due respect to the measure of wisdom, though it be less, which is bestowed upon her husband.

"Dwell with them." This, indeed, implies and supposes their abiding with their wives, so far as

their calling and lawful affairs permit; but I conceive, that what it expressly means is, all the conversation and duties of that estate; that they so behave themselves in dwelling with them, as becomes men of knowledge, wise and prudent husbands; which returns them usually the gain of the full reverence and respect due to them, of which they rob and divest themselves, who are either of a foolish or trifling carriage, or of too austere and rigid a conversation.

"Giving honour unto the wife." This, I conceive, is not, as some take it, convenient maintenance, though that is a requisite duty too, and may be taken in under this word; but it seems to be, chiefly, a due conjugal esteem of them, and respect to them, the husband not vilifying and despising them, which will be apt to grieve and exasperate them; not disclosing the weaknesses of the wife to others, nor observing them too narrowly himself, but hiding them both from others' and his own eyes by love; not seeing them further than love itself requires, that is, to the wise rectifying of them by mild advices and admonitions that flow from love. And to this the reasons, indeed, suit well. It seems at first a little incongruous, "Honour" because "weaker," but not when we consider the kind of honour; not of reverence as superior, for that is their part, but of esteem and respect, without which, indeed, love cannot consist, for we cannot love that which we do not in some good measure esteem. And care should be taken that they be not contemned and slighted, even because they are weaker; for of all injuries, contempt is one of the most smarting and sensible, especially to weak persons, who feel most exactly the least touches of this. *Omne infirmum naturâ*

querelum; "Every weak being is naturally peevish;" whereas greater spirits are a little harder against opinion, and more indifferent for it. Some wives may, indeed, be of a stronger mind and judgment than their husbands, yet these rules respect the general condition of the sexes, and speak of the females as ordinarily weaker.

Again, love, which is ever to be supposed one article, and the main one, (for nothing, indeed, can be right, where that supposition proves false,) love, I say, supposed, this reason is very enforcing, that the weaker the vessels be, the more tenderly they should be used; and the more a prudent passing by of frailties is needful, there love will study it, and bestow it the more. Yea, this tie, you know, makes two one; and that which is a part of ourselves, the more it needs in that respect, the "more comeliness we put upon it," as the apostle St. Paul tells us, 1 Cor. xii. 23. And this further may be considered, that there is a mutual need of this honouring which consists in not despising and in covering of frailties, as is even implied in this, that the woman is not called simply weak, but the weaker, and the husband, who is generally, by nature's advantage, or should be, the stronger, yet is weak too; for both are vessels of earth, and therefore frail; both polluted with sin, and therefore subject to a multitude of sinful follies and frailties. But as the particular frailty of their nature pleads on behalf of women for that honour, so, the other reason added is taken, not from their particular disadvantage, but from their common privilege and advantage of grace as Christians, that the Christian husband and wife are equally "coheirs" of the same "grace of life."

"As being heirs together of the grace of life."

This is that which most strongly binds all these duties on the hearts of husbands and wives, and most strongly indeed binds their hearts together, and makes them one. If each be reconciled unto God in Christ, and so an heir of life, and one with God, then are they truly one in God with each other; and that is the surest and sweetest union that can be. Natural love hath risen very high in some husbands and wives; but the highest of it falls very far short of that which holds in God. Hearts concentring in him, are most and excellently one. That love which is cemented by youth and beauty, when these moulder and decay, as soon they do, fades too. That is somewhat purer, and so more lasting, which holds in a natural or moral harmony of minds; yet these likewise may alter and change by some great accident. But the most refined, most spiritual, and most indissoluble, is that which is knit with the highest and purest spirit. And the ignorance or disregard of this, is the great cause of so much bitterness, or so little true sweetness, in the life of most married persons; because God is left out, because they meet not as one in him.

"Heirs together." Loth will they be to despise one another, who are both bought with the precious blood of one Redeemer, and loth to grieve one another. Being in him brought into peace with God, they will entertain true peace betwixt themselves, and not suffer any thing to disturb it. They have hopes to meet, one day, where there is nothing but perfect concord and peace; they will therefore live as heirs of that life here, and make their present state as like to heaven as they can, and so, a pledge and evidence of their title to that inheritance of peace

which is there laid up for them. And they will not fail to put one another often in mind of those hopes and that inheritance, and mutually to advance and further each other towards it. Where this is not the case, it is to little purpose to speak of other rules. Where neither party aspires to this heirship, live they otherwise as they will, there is one common inheritance abiding them, one inheritance of everlasting flames; and, as they do increase the sin and guiltiness of one another by their irreligious conversation, so that which some of them do wickedly here, upon no great cause, they shall have full cause for doing there; cause to curse the time of their coming together, and that shall be a part of their exercise for ever. But happy those persons, in any society of marriage or friendship, who converse together as those that shall live eternally together in glory. This indeed is the sum of all duties.

"Life." A sweet word, but sweetest of all in this sense! That life above is indeed alone worthy the name, and this we have here, in comparison—let it not be called life, but a continual dying, an incessant journey towards the grave. If you reckon years, it is but a short moment to him that attains the fullest old age; but reckon miseries and sorrows, it is long to him that dies young. Oh! that this only blessed life were more known, and then it would be more desired.

"Grace." This is the tenor of this heirship, free grace: this life is a free gift, Rom. vi. 23. No life so spotless, either in marriage or virginity, as to lay claim to this life upon other terms. If we consider but a little, what it is, and what we are, this will be quickly out of question with us; and we shall be

most gladly content to hold it thus, by deed of gift, and shall admire and extol that grace which bestows it.

"That your prayers be not hindered." He supposes in Christians the necessary and frequent use of this; takes it for granted, that the heirs of life cannot live without prayer. This is the proper breathing and language of these heirs, none of whom are dumb; they can all speak. These heirs, if they be alone, they pray alone; if heirs together, and living together, they pray together. Can the husband and wife have that love, wisdom, and meekness, which may make their life happy, and that blessing which may make their affairs successful, while they neglect God, the only Giver of these and all good things? You think these needless motives, but you cannot think how it would sweeten your converse if it were used: it is prayer that sanctifies, seasons, and blesses all. And it is not enough that they pray when with the family, but even husband and wife together by themselves, and also with their children; that they, especially the mother, as being most with them in their childhood, when they begin to be capable, may draw them apart, and offer them to God, often praying with them, and instructing them in their youth; for they are pliable while young, as glass is when hot, but afterwards, will sooner break than bend.

But above all, prayer is necessary as they are heirs of heaven, often sending up their desires thither. You that are not much in prayer, appear as if you look for no more than what you have here. If you had an inheritance and treasure above, would not your hearts delight to be there? Thus, the heart of a Christian is in the constant frame of it, but after a special manner prayer raises the soul above the

world, and sets it in heaven; it is its near access unto God, and dealing with him, specially about those affairs which concern that inheritance. Now in this lies a great part of the comfort a Christian can have here; and the apostle knew this, that he would gain any thing at their hands, which he pressed by this argument, that otherwise they would be "hindered in their prayers." He knew that they who are acquainted with prayer, find such unspeakable sweetness in it, that they will rather do any thing than be prejudiced in that.

Now the breach of conjugal love, the jars and contentions of husband and wife, do, out of doubt, so leaven and embitter their spirits, that they are exceedingly unfit for prayer, which is the sweet harmony of the soul in God's ears: and when the soul is so far out of tune as those distempers make it, He cannot but perceive it, whose ear is the most exact of all, for he made and tuned the ear, and is the fountain of harmony. It cuts the sinews and strength of prayer, makes breaches and gaps, as wounds at which the spirits fly out, as the cutting of a vein, by which, as they speak, it bleeds to death. When the soul is calm and composed, it may behold the face of God shining on it. And those who pray together, should not only have hearts in tune within themselves in their own frame, but tuned together; especially husband and wife, who are one, they should have hearts consorted and sweetly tuned to each other for prayer: so the word is, *ἐὰν συμφωνήσωσιν*, Matt. xviii. 19.

And it is true, in the general, that all unwary walking in Christians wrongs their communion with Heaven, and casts a damp upon their prayers, so as to clog the wings of it. These two mutually help

one another; "prayer," and "holy conversation:" the more exactly we walk, the more fit are we for prayer; and the more we pray, the more are we enabled to walk exactly; and it is a happy life to find the correspondence of these two, "calling on the Lord," and "departing from iniquity," 2 Tim. ii. 19. Therefore, that you may pray much, live holily; and, that you may live holily, be much in prayer. Surely such are the heirs of glory, and this is their way to it.

Ver. 8. Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous.

Here the particular rules the apostle gives to several relations, fall in again to the main current of his general exhortation, which concerns us all as Christians. The return of his discourse to this universality, is expressed in that "finally," and the universality of these duties, in "all." It is neither possible nor convenient to descend to every particular; but there is supposed in a Christian an ingenuous and prudent spirit, to adapt those general rules to his particular actions and conversation; squaring by them beforehand, and examining by them after. And yet herein the most fail. Men hear these as general discourses, and let them pass so; they apply them not, or, if they do, it is readily to some other person. But they are addressed to all, that each one may regulate himself by them; and so these Divine truths are like a well-drawn picture, which looks particularly upon every one amongst the great multitude that look upon it. And this one verse hath a cluster of five Christian graces, or virtues. That which is in the middle, as the stalk or root of

the rest, "love," and the others growing out of it, two on each side, unanimity and sympathy on the one, and pity and courtesy on the other. But we shall take them as they lie.

"Of one mind." This doth not only mean union in judgment, but it extends likewise to affection and action; especially in so far as they relate to, and depend upon the other. And so, I conceive, it comprehends, in its full latitude, a harmony and agreement of minds, and affections, and carriage in Christians, as making up one body, and a serious study of preserving and increasing that agreement in all things, but especially in spiritual things, in which their communion doth primely consist. And because in this the consent of their judgments in matters of religion is a prime point, therefore we will consider that a little more particularly.

And first, What it is not.

1. It is not a careless indifference concerning those things. Not to be troubled about them at all, nor to make any judgment concerning them, this is not a loving agreement, arising from oneness of spirit, but a dead stupidity, arguing a total spiritlessness. As the agreement of a number of dead bodies together, which indeed do not strive and contest, that is, they move not at all, because they live not; so that concord in things of religion, which is a not considering them, nor acting of the mind about them, is the fruit and sign either of gross ignorance, or of irreligion. They who are wholly ignorant of spiritual things, are content that you determine and impose upon them what you will; as in the dark, there is no difference nor choice of colours—they are all one. But, 2. Which is worse, in some this peaceableness about religion arises from a universal unbelief and

disaffection; and that sometimes comes of the much search and knowledge of debates and controversies in religion. Men having so many disputes about religion in their heads, and no life of religion in their hearts, fall into a conceit that all is but juggling, and that the easiest way is, to believe nothing; and these agree with any, or rather with none. Sometimes it is from a profane supercilious disdain of all these things; and many there be among those of Gallio's temper, who "care for none of these things," and who account all questions in religion, as he did, but matter of words and names. And by this all religions may agree together. But that were not a natural union produced by the active heat of the spirit, but a confusion rather, arising from the want of it; not a knitting together, but a freezing together, as cold congregates all bodies, how heterogeneous soever, sticks, stones, and water; but heat makes first a separation of different things, and then unites those that are of the same nature.

And to one or other of these two much of the common quietness of people's minds about religion is reducible. All that implicit Romish agreement which they boast of, what is it, but a brutish ignorance of spiritual things, authorized and recommended for that very purpose? And amongst the learned of them, there are as many idle differences and disputes as amongst any. It is an easy way, indeed, to agree, if all will put out their eyes and follow the blind guiding of their judge of controversies. This is that *πάνσοφον φάρμακον*, their great device for peace, to let the pope determine all. If all will resolve to be cozened by him, he will agree them all. As if the consciences of men should only find peace by being led by the nose at one man's pleasure! A way the

apostle Paul clearly renounces: "Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy; for by faith ye stand," 2 Cor. i. 24.

And though we have escaped this, yet much of our common union of minds, I fear, proceeds from no other than the afore-mentioned causes, want of knowledge, and want of affection to religion. You that boast you live conformably to the appointments of the church, and that no one hears of your noise, we may thank the ignorance of your minds for that kind of quietness. But the unanimity here required is another thing; and before I unfold it, I shall premise this—That although it be very difficult, and, it may be, impossible to determine what things are alone fundamental in religion, under the notion of difference, intended by that word, yet it is undoubted, that there are some truths more absolutely necessary, and therefore accordingly more clearly revealed than some others; there are *μέγαλα τοῦ νόμου*, "great things of the law," and so of the gospel. And though no part of Divine truth, once fully cleared, ought to be slighted, yet there are things that may be true, and still are but of less importance, and of less evidence than others; and this difference is wisely to be considered by Christians, for the interest of this agreement of minds, here recommended. And concerning it we may safely conclude,—

1. That Christians ought to have a clear and unanimous belief of the mysteries and principles of faith; to agree in those without controversy. 2. They ought to be diligent in the research of truth in all things that concern faith and religion; and withal to use all due means for the fullest consent and agreement in them all, that possibly can be attained. 3. Perfect and universal consent in all,

after all industry bestowed on it, for any thing we know, is not here attainable, neither betwixt all churches, nor all persons in one and the same church; and therefore, though church meetings and synods, as the fittest and most effectual way to this unity, should endeavour to bring the church to the fullest agreement that may be, yet they should beware lest the straining it too high in all things, rather break it, and an over-diligence in appointing uniformities, remove them further from it. Leaving a latitude and indifferency in things capable of it, is often a stronger preserver of peace and unity. But this by the way. We will rather give some few rules that may be of use to every particular Christian, toward this common Christian good of unity of mind.

1. Beware of two extremes, which often cause divisions, captivity to custom on the one hand, and affectation of novelty on the other.

2. Labour for a staid mind, that will not be tossed with every "wind of doctrine," or appearance of reason, as some who, like vanes, are easily blown to any side with mistakes of the Scriptures, either arising in their own minds, or suggested by others.

3. In unclear and doubtful things, be not pertinacious, as the weakest minds are readiest to be upon seeming reason, which, when tried, will possibly fall to nothing; yet they are most assured, and cannot suffer a different thought in any from their own. There is naturally this *popeness* in every man's mind, and most, I say, in the shallowest; a kind of fancied infallibility in themselves, which makes them contentious, contrary to the apostle's rule, "Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory," Phil. ii. 3, and as earnest upon differing in the smallest punctilio, as in

a high article of faith. Stronger spirits are usually more patient of contradiction, and less violent, especially in doubtful things; and those who see furthest, are least peremptory in their determinations. The apostle, in his Second Epistle to Timothy, hath a phrase, "the spirit of a sound mind:" it is a good, sound constitution of mind, not to feel every blast, either of seeming reason to be taken with it, or of cross opinion to be offended at it.

4. Join that which is there, the spirit of love, in this particular: not at all abating affection for every light difference. And this the most are a little to blame in; whereas the abundance of that should rather fill up the gap of these petty disagreements, that they do not appear, nor be at all sensibly to be found. No more disaffection ought to follow this, than the difference of our faces and complexions, or feature of body, which cannot be found in any two alike in all things.

And these things would be of easier persuasion, if we considered, 1. How supple and flexible a thing human reason is, and therefore not lightly to be trusted to, especially in Divine things; for here "we know but in part," 1 Cor. xiii. 9. 2. The small importance of some things that have bred much noise and dissension in the world, as the apostle speaks of the tongue,—How little a spark, how great a fire will it kindle! James iii. 5. And a great many of those debates which cost men so much pains and time, are as far from clear decision, as when they began, and are possibly of so little moment, that if they were ended, their profit would not quit the cost. 3. Consider the strength of Christian charity, which, if it dwelt much in our hearts, would preserve this union of mind amidst

very many different thoughts, such as they may be, and would teach us that excellent lesson the apostle gives to this purpose: "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded; and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing," Phil. iii. 15, 16. Let us follow our Lord unanimously in what he hath clearly manifested to us, and given us with one consent to embrace; as the spheres, notwithstanding each one hath its particular motion, yet all are wheeled about together with the first.

And this leads us to consider the further extent of this word, to agree in heart and in conversation, walking by the rule of those undoubted truths we have received. And in this I shall recommend these two things to you:—

1. In the defence of the truth, as the Lord shall call us, let us be of one mind, and all as one man. Satan acts by that maxim, and all his followers have it, "Divide and conquer:" and therefore let us hold that counter-maxim, "Union invincible."

2. In the practice of that truth, agree as one. Let your conversation be uniform, by being squared to that one rule, and in all spiritual exercises join as one; be "of one heart and mind." Would not our public worship, think you, prove much more both comfortable and profitable, if our hearts met in it as one, so that we could say of our hearing the word, as he, Acts x. 33, "We are all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded of God?" if our prayers ascended up as one pillar of incense to the throne of grace; if they besieged it, as an army, *stipato agmine Deum obsidentes,*

as Tertullian speaks, all surrounding it together to obtain favour for ourselves and the church? This is much with God, the consent of hearts petitioning. *Fama est junctas fortius ire preces:* "It is believed that united prayers ascend with greater efficacy." So says our Saviour, "Where two or three are gathered," Matt. xviii. 20; not their bodies within the same walls only, for so they are but so many carcasses tumbled together, and the promise of his being amongst us is not made to that, "for he is the God of the living and not of the dead," Matt. xxii. 32; it is the spirit of darkness that abides amongst the tombs and graves; but—"gathered together in my name;" one in that one holy name, written upon their hearts, and uniting them, and so thence expressed in their joint services and invocations. So he says there of them who "agree upon any thing they shall ask," (*συμφωνήσουσιν,*) if all their hearts present and hold it up together, if they make one cry or song of it, that harmony of their hearts shall be sweet in the Lord's ears, and shall draw a gracious answer out of his hand: "if ye agree," your joint petitions shall be, as it were, an arrest or decree that shall stand in heaven: "it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." But alas! where is our agreement? The greater number of hearts say nothing, and others speak with such wavering and such a jarring harsh noise, being out of tune, earthly, too low set, that they spoil all, and disappoint the answers. Were the censer filled with those united prayers heaven-wards, it would be filled with fire earth-wards against the enemies of the church.

And in your private society, seek unanimously your own and each other's spiritual good; not only

agreeing in your affairs and civil converse, but having one heart and mind as Christians. To eat and drink together, if you do no more, is such society as beasts may have: to do these in the excess, to eat and drink intemperately together, is a society worse than that of beasts, and below them. To discourse together of civil business, is to converse as men; but the peculiar converse of Christians in that notion, as born again to immortality, an unfading inheritance above, is to further one another towards that, put one another in mind of heaven and heavenly things. And it is strange that men who profess to be Christians, when they meet, either fill one another's ears with lies and profane speeches, or with vanities and trifles, or, at the best, with the affairs of the earth, and not a word of those things that should most possess the heart, and where the mind should be most set, but are ready to reproach and taunt any such thing in others. What! are you ashamed of Christ and religion? Why do you profess it then? Is there such a thing, think ye, as the communing of saints? If not, why say you believe it? It is a truth, think of it as you will. The public ministry will profit little any where, where a people, or some part of them, are not thus one, and do not live together as of one mind, and use diligently all due means of edifying one another in their holy faith. How much of the primitive Christians' praise and profit is involved in the word, "They were together [ὁμοθυμαδὸν] with one accord, with one mind;" and so they grew; "the Lord added to the church," Acts ii. 1, 44, 47.

Consider, 1. How the wicked are one in their ungodly designs and practices. "The scales of leviathan," as Luther expresses it, are "linked

together;" shall not the Lord's followers be one in him? They unite to undermine the peace of the church; shall not the godly join their prayers to countermine them?

2. There is in the hearts of all the saints one spirit; how then can they be but one? Since they have the same purpose and journey, and tend to the same home, why should they not walk together in that way? When they shall arrive there, they shall be fully one, and of one mind, not a jar nor difference, all their harps perfectly in tune to that one new song.

"Having compassion." This testifies, that it is not a bare speculative agreement of opinions that is the badge of Christian unity; for this may accidentally be, where there is no further union; but that they are themselves one, and have one life, in that they feel how it is one with another. There is a living sympathy amongst them, as making up one body, animated with one spirit; for that is the reason why the members of the body have that mutual feeling, even the most remote and distant, and the most excellent with the meanest. This the apostle urges at large, Rom. xii. 4, and 1 Cor. xii. 14—17.

And this lively sense is in every living member of the body of Christ towards the whole, and towards each other particular part. This makes a Christian rejoice in the welfare and good of another, as if it were his own, and feel their griefs and distresses, as if himself were really a sharer in them; for the word comprehends all feeling together, feeling of joy as well as grief, Heb. xiii. 3; 1 Cor. xii. 26. And always, where there is most of grace and of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, there is most of this

sympathy. The apostle St. Paul, as he was eminent in all grace, had a large portion of this, 2 Cor. xi. 29. And if this ought to be in reference to their outward condition, much more in spiritual things there should be rejoicing at the increases and flourishing of grace in others. That base envy which dwells in the hearts of rotten hypocrites, who would have all engrossed to themselves, argues that they move not further than the compass of self; that the pure love of God, and the sincere love of their brethren flowing from it, are not in them. But when the heart can unfeignedly rejoice in the Lord's bounty to others, and the lustre of grace in others, far outshining their own, truly it is an evidence that what grace such a one hath, is upright and good, and that the law of love is engraven on his heart. And where that is, there will be likewise, on the other side, a compassionate tender sense of the infirmities and frailties of their brethren; whereas some account it a sign of much advancement and spiritual proficiency, to be able to sit in judgment upon the qualifications and actions of others, and to lavish out severe censures round about them; to sentence one weak and of poor abilities, and another proud and lofty, and a third covetous, &c., and thus to go on in a censor-like, magisterial strain. But it were truly an evidence of more grace, not to get upon the bench to judge them, but to sit down rather and mourn for them, when they are manifestly and really faulty; and as for their ordinary infirmities, to consider and bear them. These are the characters we find in the Scriptures, of stronger Christians, Rom. xv. 1; Gal. vi. 1. This holy and humble sympathy argues indeed a strong Christian. *Nil tam spiritualem virum indicat, quam peccati alieni tractatio:*

"Nothing truly shows a spiritual man so much, as the dealing with another man's sin." Far will he be from the ordinary way of insulting and trampling upon the weak, or using rigour and bitterness, even against some gross falls of a Christian; but will rather vent his compassion in tears, than his passion in fiery railings; will bewail the frailty of man, and our dangerous condition in this life, amidst so many snares and temptations, and such strong and subtle enemies.

2. As this sympathy works towards particular Christians in their several conditions, so, by the same reason, it acts, and that more eminently, towards the church, and the public affairs that concern its good. And this, we find, hath breathed forth from the hearts of the saints in former times, in so many pathetical complaints and prayers for Zion. Thus David in his saddest times, when he might seem most dispensable to forget other things, and be wholly taken up with lamenting his own fall, yet, even there, he leaves not out the church; "In thy good pleasure, do good to Zion," Psa. li. 18. And though his heart was broken all to pieces, yet the very pieces cry no less for the building of Jerusalem's wall, than for the binding up and healing of itself. And in that cxxiind Psalm, which seems to be the expression of his joy on being exalted to the throne and sitting peaceably on it, yet he still thus prays for "the peace of Jerusalem." And the penman of the cxxxviith Psalm, makes it an execrable oversight to forget Jerusalem, or to remember it coldly or secondarily: no less will serve him than to "prefer it to his chief joy." Whatsoever else is top or head of his joy, (as the word is,) Jerusalem's welfare shall be its crown, shall be set above

it. And the prophet, whoever it was, that wrote that cliind Psalm, and in it poured out that prayer from "an afflicted soul," comforts himself in this, that Zion shall be favoured. "My days are like a shadow that declineth, and I am withered like grass," but it matters not what becomes of me; let me languish and wither away, provided Zion flourish; though I feel nothing but pains and troubles, "yet thou wilt arise and show mercy to Zion:" I am content: that satisfies me.

But where is now this spirit of high sympathy with the church? Surely, if there were any remains of it in us, it is now a fit time to exert it. If we be not altogether dead, surely we shall be stirred with the voice of those late strokes of God's hand, and be driven to more humble and earnest prayer by it. When will men change their poor, base grumblings about their private concerns, Oh! what shall I do? &c., into strong cries for the church of God, and the public deliverance of all these kingdoms from the raging sword? But vile selfishness undoes us, the most looking no further. If themselves and theirs might be secured, how many would regard little what became of the rest! As one said, "When I am dead, let the world be fired." But the Christian mind is of a larger sphere, looks not only upon more than itself in present, but even to after times and ages, and can rejoice in the good to come, when itself shall not be here to partake of it: it is more dilated, and liker unto God, and to our Head, Jesus Christ. "The Lord," says the prophet, "in all his people's affliction, was afflicted himself," Isa. lxiii. 9. And Jesus Christ accounts the sufferings of his body, the church, his own: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Acts ix. 4. The heel was trod

upon on earth, and the Head crieth from heaven, as sensible of it. And this in all our evils, especially our spiritual gifts, is a high point of comfort to us, that our Lord Jesus is not insensible of them. This emboldens us to complain ourselves, and to put in our petitions for help to the throne of grace through his hand, knowing that when he presents them, he will speak his own sense of our condition, and move for us as it were for himself, as we have it sweetly expressed, Heb. iv. 15, 16. Now, as it is our comfort, so it is our pattern.

"Love as brethren." Hence springs this feeling we speak of: love is the cause of union, and union the cause of sympathy, and of that unanimity mentioned before. They who have the same spirit uniting and animating them, cannot but have the same mind and the same feelings. And this spirit is derived from that Head, Christ, in whom Christians "live, and move, and have their being," their new and excellent being, and so, living in him, they love him, and are one in him: they are "brethren," as here the word is: their fraternity holds in him. He is the Head of it, "the first-born among many brethren," Rom. viii. 29. Men are brethren in two natural respects, their bodies are of the same earth, and their souls breathed from the same God; but this third fraternity which is founded in Christ, is far more excellent and more firm than the other two; for being one in him, they have there taken in the other two, inasmuch as in him is our whole nature: He is the "man Christ Jesus." But to the advantage, and it is an infinite one, of being one in him, we are united to the Divine nature in him, "who is God blessed for ever," Rom. ix. 5; and this is the highest, certainly, and the strongest union

that can be imagined. Now this is "a great mystery," indeed, as the apostle says, Eph. v. 32, speaking of this same point, the union of Christ and his church, whence their union and communion one with another, who make up that body, the church, is derived. In Christ every believer is "born of God," is his son; and so, they are not only brethren one with another, who are so born, but Christ himself owns them as his brethren; "Both he that sanctifies, and they who are sanctified, are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren," Heb. ii. 11.

Sin broke all to pieces, man from God, and men from one another. Christ's work in the world was, *union*. To make up these breaches he came down, and began the union which was his work, in the wonderful union made in his person that was to work it, making God and man one. And as the nature of man was reconciled, so, by what he performed, the persons of men are united to God. Faith makes them one with Christ, and he makes them one with the Father, and hence results this oneness amongst themselves: concentring and meeting in Jesus Christ, and in the Father through him, they are made one together. And that this was his great work, we may read in his prayer, John xvii., where it is the burden and main strain, the great request he so reiterates, "That they may be one, as we are one," ver. 11. A high comparison, such as man durst not name, but after him who so warrants us! And again, ver. 21, "That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us."

So that certainly, where this exists, it is the ground-work of another kind of friendship and love

than the world is acquainted with, or is able to judge of, and hath more worth in one drachm of it than all the quintessence of civil or natural affection can amount to. The friendships of the world, the best of them, are but tied with chains of glass; but this fraternal love of Christians is a golden chain, both more precious, and more strong and lasting: the others are worthless and brittle.

The Christian owes and pays a general charity and good-will to all; but peculiar and intimate friendship he cannot have, except with such as come within the compass of this fraternal love, which, after a special manner, flows from God, and returns to him, and abides in him, and shall remain unto eternity.

Where this love is and abounds, it will banish far away all those dissensions and bitternesses, and those frivolous mistakings, which are so frequent among most persons. It will teach men wisely and gently to admonish one another, where it is needful; but further than that, it will pass by many offences and failings, it will "cover a multitude of sins," and will very much sweeten society, making it truly profitable; therefore the psalmist calls it both "good and pleasant, that brethren dwell together in unity:" it perfumes all, as the precious ointment upon the head of Aaron, Psa. cxxxiii. 2, 3.

But many who are called Christians, are not indeed of this brotherhood, and therefore no wonder they know not what this love means, but are either of restless, unquiet spirits, "biting and devouring one another," as the apostle speaks, or at the best, only civilly smooth and peaceable in their carriage, rather scorners than partakers of this spiritual love and fraternity. These are strangers to Christ, not

brought into acquaintance and union with him, and therefore void of the life of grace, and the fruits of it, whereof this is a chief one. Oh! how few amongst multitudes that throng in as we do here together, are indeed partakers of the "glorious liberty of the sons of God," or ambitious of that high and happy estate!

As for you that know these things, and have a portion in them, who have your "communion with the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ," 1 John i. 3, I beseech you, adorn your holy profession, and testify yourselves the disciples and the brethren of Jesus Christ, by this mutual love. Seek to understand better what it is, and to know it more practically. Consider that source of love, that "love which the Father hath bestowed upon us," in this, "that we should be called the sons of God," 1 John iii. 1, and so be brethren, and thence draw more of this sweet stream of love. "God is love," says the same apostle; therefore, surely where there is most of God, there is most of this Divine grace, this holy love. Look upon and study much that infinite love of God and his Son Jesus Christ towards us. "He gave his only begotten Son;" the Son "gave himself;" he sweetened his bitter cup with his transcendent love, and this he hath recommended to us, that "even as he loved us, so should we love one another," John xv. 12. We know we cannot reach this highest pattern; that is not meant; but the more we look on it, the higher we shall reach in this love, and shall learn some measure of such love on earth as is in heaven, and that which so begins here shall there be perfected.

"Be pitiful, be courteous." The roots of plants are hidden under ground, so that they are not seen,

but they appear in their branches, and flowers, and fruits, which argue there is a root and life in them: thus the graces of the Spirit planted in the soul, though themselves invisible, yet discover their being and life in the tract of a Christian's life, his words, and actions, and the frame of his carriage. Thus faith shows that *it lives*, as the apostle St. James teacheth at large, James ii. 14, &c. And thus love is a grace of so active a nature, that it is still working, and yet never weary. "Your labour of love," says the apostle, Heb. vi. 10: it labours, but delight makes the hardest labour sweet and easy. And so proper is action to it, that all action is null without it, 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3. Yea, it knits faith and action together; it is the link that unites them. "Faith worketh," but it is, as the apostle teaches us, "by love," Gal. v. 6. So, then, where this root is, these fruits will spring from it, and discover it, pity and courtesy.

These are of a larger extent in their full sphere, than the preceding graces: for, from a general love due to all, they act towards all, to men, or humanity, in the general; and this not from a bare natural tenderness, which softer complexions may have, nor from a prudent moral consideration of their own possible falling under the like or greater calamities, but out of obedience to God, who requires this mercifulness in all his children, and cannot own them for his, unless in this they resemble him. And it is indeed an evidence of a truly Christian mind, to have much of this pity to the miseries of all, being rightly principled, and acting after a pious and Christian manner towards the sick and poor, of what condition soever; yea, pitying most the spiritual misery of ungodly men, their hardness of heart, and

unbelief, and earnestly wishing their conversion; not repining at the long-suffering of God, as if thou wouldst have the bridge cut because thou art over, as St. Augustine speaks, but longing rather to see that "long-suffering and goodness of God lead them to repentance," Rom. ii. 4; being grieved to see men ruining themselves, and diligently working their own destruction, "going in any way of wickedness," as Solomon speaks of one particularly, "as an ox to the slaughter, or a fool to the correction of the stocks," Prov. vii. 22. Certainly the ungodly man is an object of the highest pity.

But there is a special debt of this pity to those whom we love as brethren in our Lord Jesus: they are most closely linked to us by a peculiar fraternal love. Their sufferings and calamities will move the bowels that have Christian affection within them. Nor is it an empty, helpless pity, but carries with it the real communication of our help to our utmost power [εὐσπλαγχνοι]. Not only bowels that are moved themselves with pity, but that move the hand to succour; for by this word, the natural affection of parents, and of the more tender parent, the mother, is expressed, who do not idly behold and bemoan their children being sick or distressed, but provide all possible help; their bowels are not only stirred, but dilated and enlarged towards them.

And if our feeling bowels and helping hand are due to all, and particularly to the godly, and we ought to pay this debt in outward distresses, how much more in their soul-afflictions!—the rather, because these are most heavy in themselves, and least understood, and therefore least regarded; yea, sometimes rendered yet heavier by natural friends, possibly by their bitter scoffs and taunts, or by their slighting,

or, at best, by their misapplying of proper helps and remedies, which, as unfit medicines, do rather exasperate the disease; therefore they that do understand, and can be sensible of that kind of wound, ought so much the more to be tender and pitiful towards it, and to deal mercifully and gently with it. It may be, very weak things sometimes trouble a weak Christian; but there is in the spirit of the godly, a humble condescension learned from Christ, who "broke not the bruised reed, nor quenched the smoking flax."

The least difficulties and scruples in a tender conscience, should not be roughly encountered; they are as a knot in a silken thread, and require a gentle and wary hand to loose them.

Now, this tenderness of bowels and inclination to pity all, especially Christians, and them especially in their peculiar pressures, is not a weakness, as some kind of spirits take it to be; this, even naturally, is a generous pity in the greatest spirits. Christian pity is not womanish, yea, it is more than manly, it is Divine. There is of natural pity most in the best and most ingenuous natures, but where it is spiritual, it is a prime lineament of the image of God; and the more absolute and disengaged it is, in regard of those towards whom it acts, the more it is like unto God; looking upon misery as a sufficient incentive of pity and mercy, without the ingredient of any other consideration. It is merely a vulgar piece of goodness, to be helpful and bountiful to friends, or to such as are within appearance of requital; it is a trading kind of commerce, that: but pity and bounty, which need no inducements but the meeting of a fit object to work on, where it can expect nothing, save only the privilege of doing good, which in itself is

so sweet, is God-like indeed. He is rich in bounty without any necessity, yea, or possibility of return from us; for we have neither any thing to confer upon him, nor hath he need of receiving any thing, who is the spring of goodness and of being.

And that we may the better understand him in this, he is pleased to express this his merciful nature in our notion and language, by bowels of mercy and pity, Isa. liv. 7, 8; and the stirring and sounding of them, Hos. xi. 8, by the pity of a father, Psa. ciii. 13, and by that of a mother, Isa. xlix. 15, as if nothing could be tender and significant enough to express his compassions. Hence our redemption, Isa. lxiii. 9; hence all our hopes of happiness. The gracious Lord saw his poor creatures undone by sin, and no power in heaven or on earth able to rescue them, but his own alone; therefore his pity was moved, and his hand answers his heart. "His own arm brought salvation," Isa. lix. 16; he sent "the Deliverer out of Zion, to turn away iniquity from Jacob," Rom. xi. 26. And in all exigences of his children, he is overcome with their complaints, and cannot hold out against their moanings. He may, as Joseph, seem strange for a while, but cannot act that strangeness long. His heart moves and sounds to theirs, gives the echo to their griefs and groans; as they say of two strings that are perfect unisons, touch the one, the other also sounds. "Surely I have heard Ephraim bemoaning himself .... Is Ephraim my dear son?" Jer. xxxi. 18, 20. Oh! the unspeakable privilege to have him for our Father, who is "the Father of mercies and compassions," and those not barren, fruitless pityings, for he is withal "the God of all consolations." Do not think that he can shut out a bleeding soul that

comes to him, or refuse to take, and to bind up, and heal a broken heart that offers itself to him, puts itself into his hand, and entreats his help. Doth he require pity of us, and doth he give it to us, and is it not infinitely more in himself? All that is in angels and men, is but an insensible drop to that ocean!

Let us then consider, that we are obliged both to pity, especially towards our Christian brethren, and to use all means for their help within our reach: to have bowels stirred with the report of such bloodsheds and cruelties as come to our ears, and to bestir ourselves according to our places and power for them. But surely all are to move this one way for their help, to run to the throne of grace. If your bowels sound for your brethren, let them sound that way for them, to represent their estate to Him who is highest, both in pity and in power, for he expects to be remembranced by us: he put that office upon his people, to be his recorders for Zion, and they are traitors to it, who neglect the discharge of that trust.

"Courteous." The former relates to the afflictions of others, this to our whole carriage with them in any condition. And yet, there is a particular regard to be paid to it in communicating good, in supplying their wants, or comforting them that are distressed; that it be not done, or rather, I may say, undone in doing, with such supercilious roughness, venting itself either in looks or words, or any way, as sours it, and destroys the very being of a benefit, and turns it rather into an injury. And generally, the whole conversation of men is made unpleasant by cynical harshness and disdain.

This courteousness which the apostle recommends, is contrary to that evil, not only in the surface and

outward behaviour: no; religion doth not prescribe, nor is satisfied with such courtesy as goes no deeper than words and gestures, which sometimes is most contrary to that singleness which religion owns. These are the upper garments of malice; saluting him aloud in the morning, whom they are undermining all the day. Or sometimes, though more innocent, yet it may be troublesome, merely by the vain affectation and excess of it. Even this becomes not a wise man, much less a Christian. An overstudy or acting of that, is a token of emptiness, and is below a solid mind. Though Christians know such things, and could outdo the studiers of it, yet they, as it indeed deserves, do despise it. Nor is it that graver and wiser way of external plausible deportment, that answers fully this word; it is the outer half indeed, but the thing is [φιλοφροσύνη], a radical sweetness in the temper of the mind, that spreads itself into a man's words and actions; and this not merely natural, a gentle, kind disposition, which is indeed a natural advantage that some have, but this is spiritual, a new nature descended from heaven, and so, in its original and kind, far excelling the other; it supplies it where it is not in nature, and doth not only increase it where it is, but elevates it above itself, renews it, and sets a more excellent stamp upon it. Religion is in this mistaken sometimes, in that men think it imprints an ungodly roughness and austerity upon the mind and carriage. It doth indeed bar and banish all vanity and lightness, and all compliance and easy partaking with sin. Religion strains, and quite breaks that point of false and injurious courtesy, to suffer thy brother's soul to run the hazard of perishing, and to share in his guiltiness, by not admonishing him after that

seasonable, and prudent, and gentle manner, (for that indeed should be studied,) which becomes thee as a Christian, and that particular respectful manner which becomes thy station. These things rightly qualifying it, it doth no wrong to good manners and the courtesy here enjoined, but is truly a part of it, by due admonitions and reproofs to seek to reclaim a sinner; for it were the worst unkindness not to do it. "Thou shalt not hate thy brother; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy brother, and not suffer sin upon him," Lev. xix. 17.

But that which is true lovingness of heart and carriage, religion doth not only in no way prejudice, but you see requires it in the rule, and where it is wrought in the heart, works and causes it there: fetches out that crookedness and harshness which are otherwise invincible in some humours: *Emollit mores, nec sinit esse feros;* Makes the wolf dwell with the lamb. This, Christians should study, and belie the prejudices which the world take up against the power of godliness; they should study to be inwardly so minded, and of such outward behaviour, as becomes that spirit of grace which dwells in them, endeavouring to gain "those that are without," by their kind, obliging conversation.

In some copies, it is [ταπεινόφρονες] "humble;" and indeed, as this is excellent in itself, and a chief characteristic of a Christian, it agrees well with all those mentioned, and carries along with it this inward and real, not acted courteousness. Not to insist on it now, it gains at all hands with God and with men; receives much grace from God, and kills envy, and commands respect and good-will from men.

Those showers of grace that slide off from the lofty mountains, rest on the valleys, and make them

fruitful. "He giveth grace to the lowly," loves to bestow it where there is most room to receive it, and most return of ingenuous and entire praises upon the receipt; and such is the humble heart. And truly, as much humility gains much grace, so it grows by it.

It is one of the world's reproaches against those who go beyond their size in religion, that they are proud and self-conceited. Christians, beware there be nothing in you justifying this. Surely they who have most true grace, are least guilty of this. Common knowledge and gifts may "puff up," but grace does not.

He whom the Lord loads most with his richest gifts, stoops lowest, as pressed down with the weight of them. *Ille est qui superbire nescit, cui Deus ostendit misericordiam suam*: The free love of God humbles that heart most to which it is most manifested.

And towards men, humility graces all grace and all gifts; it glorifies God, and teaches others so to do. It is *conservatrix virtutum*, "the preserver of graces." Sometimes it seems to wrong them by hiding them; but, indeed, it is their safety. Hezekiah, by a vain showing of his jewels and treasures, forfeited them all: *Prodendo perdidit.*

Ver. 9. Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise, blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

Opposition helps grace both to more strength and more lustre. When Christian charity is not encountered by the world's malignance, it hath an easier task; but assaulted and overcoming, it shines the

brighter, and rises the higher; and thus it is when it "renders not evil for evil."

To repay good with evil is, amongst men, the top of iniquity; yet this is our universal guiltiness towards God, he multiplying mercies, and we vying with multiplied sins: as the Lord complains of Israel, "As they were increased so they sinned," Hos. iv. 7. The lowest step of mutual good amongst men, is, not to be bent to provoke others with injuries, and, being unoffended, to offend none. But this, not to repay offences, not "render evil for evil," is a Christian's rule; and yet, further, to return good for evil, and blessing for cursing, is not only counselled, as some vainly distinguish, but commanded, Matt. v. 44.

It is true, the most have no ambition for this degree of goodness; they aspire no further than to do or say no evil unprovoked, and think themselves sufficiently just and equitable, if they keep within that; but this is lame, is only half the rule. Thou thinkest injury obliges thee, or, if not so, yet excuses thee, to revenge, or at least disobliges thee, unties thy engagement of wishing and doing good. But these are all gross practical errors. For,

1. The second injury done by way of revenge, differs from the first that provoked it little or nothing, but only in point of time: and certainly, no one man's sin can procure privilege to another, to sin in that or the like kind. If another hath broken the bonds of his allegiance and obedience to God, and of charity to thee, yet thou art not the less tied by the same bonds still.

2. By revenge of injuries thou usurpest upon God's prerogative, who is "the avenger," as the apostle teaches, Rom. xii. 19. This doth not forbid either the magistrate's sword for just punishment of

offenders, or the soldier's sword in a just war; but such revenges as, without authority, or a lawful call, the pride and perverseness of men do multiply one against another; in which is involved a presumptuous contempt of God and his supreme authority, or at least, the unbelief and neglect of it.

3. It cannot be genuine upright goodness that hath its dependence upon the goodness of others who are about us: as they say of the vain-glorious man, his virtue lieth in the beholder's eye. If thy meekness and charity be such as lieth in the good and mild carriage of others towards thee, in their hands and tongues, thou art not owner of it intrinsically. Such quiet and calm, if none provoke thee, is but an accidental, uncertain cessation of thy turbulent spirit unstirred; but move it, and it exerts itself according to its nature, sending up that mud which lay at the bottom: whereas true grace doth then most manifest what it is, when those things which are most contrary surround and assault it; it cannot correspond and hold game with injuries and railings; it hath no faculty for that, for "answering evil with evil." A tongue inured to graciousness, and mild speeches, and blessings, and a heart stored so within, can vent no other, try it and stir it as you will. A Christian acts and speaks, not according to what others are towards him, but according to what he is through the grace and Spirit of God in him; as they say, *Quicquid recipitur, recipitur ad modum recipientis:* The same things are differently received, and work differently, according to the nature and way of that which receives them. A little spark blows up one of a sulphureous temper, and "many coals," greater injuries and reproaches, are quenched and lose their force, being

thrown at another of a "cool spirit," as the original expression is, Prov. xvii. 27.

They who have malice, and bitterness, and cursings within, though these sleep, it may be, yet, awake them with the like, and the provision comes forth "out of the abundance of the heart:" give them an ill word, and they have another, or two for one, in readiness for you. So, where the soul is furnished with spiritual blessings, their blessings come forth, even in answer to reproaches and indignities. The mouth of the wise is a tree of life, says Solomon, it can bear no other fruit, but according to its kind, and the nature of the root. An honest, spiritual heart, pluck at it who will, they can pull no other fruit than such fruit. Love and meekness lodge there, and therefore, whosoever knocks, these make the answer.

Let the world account it a despicable simplicity, seek you still more of that dove-like spirit, the spirit of meekness and blessing. It is a poor glory to vie in railings, to contest in that faculty, or in any kind of vindictive returns of evil: the most abject creatures have abundance of that great spirit, as foolish, poor-spirited persons account it; but "it is the glory of man to pass by a transgression," Prov. xix. 11; it is the noblest victory. And, as we mentioned, the highest example, God, is our pattern in love and compassions: we are well warranted to endeavour to be like him in this. Men esteem much more highly some other virtues which make more show, and trample upon these, love, and compassion, and meekness. But though these violets grow low, and are of a dark colour, yet, they are of a very sweet and diffusive smell, odoriferous graces; and the Lord propounds himself our example in them. To

"love them that hate you, and bless them that curse you," is to be truly "the children of your Father, your Father which is in heaven," Matt. v. 44—48. It is a kind of perfection, ver. 48, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good." Be you like it: howsoever men behave themselves, keep you your course, and let your benign influence, as you can, do good to all. And Jesus Christ sets in himself these things before us; "Learn of me," not to heal the sick, or raise the dead, but "learn, for I am meek and lowly in heart," Matt. xi. 29. And if you be his followers, this is your way, as the apostle here addeth, "Hereunto are you called;" and this is the end of it, agreeably to the way, "that you may inherit a blessing."

Εἰδότες ὅτι. "Knowing that." Understanding aright the nature of your holy calling, and then, considering it wisely, and conforming to it.

Those who have nothing beyond an external calling and profession of Christianity, are wholly blind in this point, and do not think what this imports, "a Christian." Could they be drawn to this, it were much, it were indeed all, to know to what they are called, and to answer to it, to walk like it. But as one calls a certain sort of lawyers, *indoctum doctorum genus*, we may call the most, an unchristian kind of Christians.

Yea, even those who are really partakers of this spiritual and effectual call, yet are often very defective in this; in viewing their rule, and laying it to their life, their hearts, and words, and actions, and squaring by it; in often asking themselves, Suits this my calling? Is this like a Christian? It is a main point in any civil station, for a man to have

a carriage suitable and convenient to his station and condition, that his actions become him: *Caput artis est decere quod facias.* But how many incongruities and solecisms do we commit, forgetting ourselves, who we are, and what we are called to; to what as our duty, and to what as our portion and inheritance. And these indeed agree together; we are called to an "undefiled, a holy inheritance," and therefore, called likewise to be holy in our way to it; for that contains all. We are called to a better estate at home, and called to be fitted for it while we are here; called to an inheritance of light, and therefore, called to walk as children of light; and so here, called to blessing as our inheritance, and to blessing as our duty; for this [εις τουτο, thereunto] relates to both, looks back to the one, and forward to the other, the way, and the end, both blessing.

The fulness of this inheritance is reserved till we come to that land where it lieth; there it abideth us; but the earnests of that fulness of blessing are bestowed on us here: "Spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ," Eph. i. 3; they descend from those heavenly places upon the heart, that precious name of our Lord Jesus poured on our hearts. If we be indeed interested in him, as we pretend, and have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, we are put in possession of that blessing of forgiveness of sin, and on terms of love and amity with the Father, being reconciled by the blood of his Son, and then blessed with the anointing of the Spirit, the graces infused from heaven. Now, all these do so cure the bitter, accursed distempers of the natural heart, and so perfume it, that it cannot well breathe any thing but sweetness and blessing towards others: being itself thus blessed of the

Lord, it echoes blessing both to God and men, echoes to his blessing of it; and its words and whole carriage are "as the smell of a field that the Lord hath blessed," as old Isaac said of his son's garments, Gen. xxvii. 27. The Lord having spoken pardon to a soul, and instead of the curse due to sin, blessed it with a title to glory, it easily and readily speaks pardon, and not only pardon, but blessing also, even to those that outrage it most, and deserve worst of it; reflecting still on that, Oh! what deserved I at my Lord's hands! When so many talents are forgiven me, shall I stick at forgiving a few pence?

And then, "called to inherit a blessing;" every believer "an heir of blessing!" And not only are the spiritual blessings he hath received, but even his largeness of blessing others, is a pledge to him, an evidence of that heirship; as those who are prone to cursing, though provoked, yet may look upon that as a sad mark, that they are heirs of a curse; "As he loved cursing, so let it come unto him," Psa. cix. 17. Shall not they who delight in cursing have enough of it, when they shall hear that doleful word, "Go, ye cursed," &c. And, on the other side, as for the sons of blessing, who spared it not to any, the blessing they are heirs to is blessedness itself, and they are to be entered into it by that joyful speech, "Come, ye blessed of my Father."

Men can but bless one another in good wishes, and can bless the Lord only in praises and applauding his blessedness; but the Lord's blessing is really "making blessed;" an operative word, which brings the thing with it.

"Inherit a blessing." Not called to be exempted from troubles and injuries here, and to be extolled

and favoured by the world, but, on the contrary, rather to suffer the utmost of their malice, and to be the mark of their arrows, of wrongs, and scoffs, and reproaches. But it matters not, this weighs down all, "You are called to inherit a blessing," which all their cursings and hatred cannot deprive you of. For as this inheriting of blessing enforces the duty of blessing others upon a Christian, so it encourages him to go through the hardest contrary measure he receives from the world. If the world should bless you, and applaud you ever so loudly, yet their blessings cannot be called an inheritance; they fly away, and die out in the air, have no substance at all, much less that endurance that may make them an inheritance. *Qui thesaurum tuum alieno in ore constituis, ignoras quod arca ista non clauditur?* "You who trust your treasure to another man's keeping, are you aware that you are leaving it in an open chest?" And more generally, is there any thing here that deserves so to be called? The surest inheritances are not more than for term of life to any one man: their abiding is for others who succeed, but he removes. *Si hæc sunt vestra, tollite ea vobiscum*, (S. Bernard,) "If these things are yours, take them away with you." And when a man is to remove from all he hath possessed and rejoiced in here, then, "fool" indeed, if nothing be provided for the longer (Oh! how much longer!) abode he must make elsewhere! Will he not then bewail his madness, that he was hunting a shadow all his lifetime? And may be, he is turned out of all his quiet possessions and easy dwelling before that, and in these times we may the more readily think of this; but at the utmost at night, when he should be for most rest, when that sad night comes after this day of

fairest prosperity, the unbelieving, unrepenting sinner lies down in sorrow, in a woeful bed. Then must he, whether he will or not, enter on the possession of this inheritance of everlasting burnings. He hath an inheritance indeed, but he had better want it, and himself too be turned to nothing. Do you believe there are treasures which neither thief breaks into, nor is there any inward moth to corrupt them, an inheritance which, though the whole world be turned upside down, is in no hazard of a touch of damage, "a kingdom," that not only cannot fall, but "cannot be shaken?" Heb. xii. 28. "Oh! be wise, and consider your latter end," and whatsoever you do, look after this blessed inheritance. Seek to have the right to it in Jesus Christ, and the evidences and seals of it from his Spirit; and if it be so with you, your hearts will be upon it, and your lives will be conformed to it.

Ver. 10. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile.

The rich bounty of God diffuses itself throughout the world upon all; yet there is a select number who have peculiar blessings of his "right hand," which the rest of the world share not in; and even as to common blessings, they are differenced by a peculiar title to them, and sweetness in them: their blessings are blessings indeed, and entirely so, outside and inside, and more so within than they appear without: the "Lord" himself "is their portion," and "they are his." This is their blessedness, which in a low estate they can challenge, and so outvie all the painted prosperity of the world. Some kind of blessings do abundantly run over upon others; but

"the cup of blessings" belongs unto the godly by a new right from heaven, graciously conferred upon them. Others are sent away "with gifts," as some apply that passage, Gen. xxv. 5, 6, but the inheritance is Isaac's. They are called to be "the sons of God," and are like him, as his children, in goodness and blessings. The inheritance of blessing is theirs alone:—"Called," says the apostle, "to inherit a blessing." And all the promises in the great charter of both Testaments, run in that appropriating style, entailed to them, as the only heirs. Thus this fitly is translated from the one Testament to the other, by the apostle, for his present purpose—"He that will love," &c. See Psa. xxxiv. 12—14.

Consider, 1. The qualification required. 2. The blessing annexed and ascertained to it; the scope being to recommend a rule so exact, and for that purpose to propound a good so important and desirable, as a sufficient attractive to study and conform to that rule.

The rule is all of it one straight line, running through the whole tract of a godly man's life; yet you see clearly that it is not cut asunder indeed, but only marked into four, whereof the two latter parcels are somewhat longer, more generally reaching a man's ways, the two former particularly regulating the tongue.

In the ten laws which God delivered in so singular a manner both by word and writ from his own mouth and hand, there are two, which if not wholly, yet most especially and most expressly concern the tongue, as a very considerable, though a small part of man; and of these four words, here two are bestowed on it.

The apostle, St. James, is large in this, teaching

the great concernment of this point. "It is a little member," says he, chap. iii. 5, "but boasteth great things," needs a strong bridle; and the bridling of it makes much for the ruling the whole course of a man's life, as the apostle there applies the resemblance; yea, he gives the skill of this as the very character of perfection. And if we consider it, it must indeed be of very great consequence how we use the tongue, it being the main outlet of the thoughts of the heart, and the mean of society amongst men in all affairs civil and spiritual; by which men give birth to the conceptions of their own minds, and seek to beget the like in the minds of others. The bit that is here made for men's mouths, hath these two halves that make it up: 1. To refrain from open evil speaking. 2. From double and guileful speaking.

"From evil." This is a large field, the evil of the tongue; but I give it too narrow a name: we have good warrant to give it a much larger—A whole universe, "a world of iniquity," James iii. 6, a vast bulk of evils, and great variety of them, as of countries on the earth, or creatures in the world; and multitudes of such are venomous and full of deadly poison, and not a few monsters, new productions of wickedness, *semper aliquid novi*, as they say of Africa.

There are, in the daily discourses of the greatest part of men, many things that belong to this world of evil, and yet pass unsuspected, so that we do not think them to be within its compass; not using due diligence and exactness in our discoveries of the several parts of it, although it is all within ourselves, yea, within a small part of ourselves, our tongues.

It were too quick a fancy to think to travel over

this world of iniquity, the whole circuit of it, in an hour, yea, or so much as to aim exactly at all the parts that can be taken of it in the smallest map; but some of the chief we would particularly take notice of in the several four parts of it; for it will without constraint hold resemblance in that division, with the other, the habitable world.

I. *Profane* speech, that which is grossly and manifestly wicked; and in that part lie, 1. Impious speeches, which directly reflect upon the glory and name of God; blasphemies, and oaths, and cursings, of which there is so great, so lamentable an abundance amongst us, the whole land overspread and defiled with it, the common noise that meets a man in streets and houses, and almost in all places where he comes; and to these join, what are not uncommon amongst us neither, scoffs and mocking at religion, the power and strictness of it, not only by the grosser sort, but by pretenders to some kind of goodness; for they who have attained to a self-pleasing pitch of civility or formal religion, have usually that point of presumption with it, that they make their own size the model and rule to examine all by. What is below it they condemn indeed as profane; but what is beyond it they account needless and affected preciseness; and, therefore, are as ready as others to let fly invectives or bitter taunts against it, which are the keen and poisoned shafts of the tongue, and a persecution that shall be called to a strict account. 2. Impure or filthy speaking, which either pollutes or offends the hearers, and is the noisome breath of a rotten, polluted heart.

II. Consider next, as another grand part of the tongue, *Uncharitable* speeches, tending to the defaming and disgrace of others; and these are like-

wise of two sorts: 1. Open railing and reproaches; 2. Secret slander and detraction. The former is unjust and cruel, but it is somewhat the less dangerous, because open. It is a fight in plain field; but truly it is no piece of a Christian's warfare to encounter it in the same kind. The sons of peace are not for these tongue combats; they are often, no doubt, set upon so, but they have another abler way of overcoming it than by the use of the same weapon; for they break and blunt the point of ill-reproaches by meekness, and triumph over cursings with more abundant blessing, as is enjoined in the former words, which are seconded with these out of Psa. xxxiv. 13, 14. But they that enter the lists in this kind, and are provided one for another with enraged minds, are usually not unprovided of weapons, but lay hold on any thing that comes next;—*Furor arma ministrat;* as your drunkards in their quarrels, in their cups and pots, if they have any other great reproach, they lay about them with that, as their sword; but if they want that, true or untrue, pertinent or impertinent, all is one, they cast out any revilings that come next to hand. But there is not only wickedness, but something of baseness in this kind of conflicts, that makes them more abound amongst the baser sort, and not so frequent with such as are but of a more civil breeding and quality than the vulgar.

But the other kind, detraction, is more general amongst all sorts, as being a far easier way of mischief in this kind, and of better conveyance. Railings cry out the matter openly, but detraction works all by surprises and stratagem, and mines under ground, and therefore is much more pernicious. The former are as the "arrows that fly by day," but this

"as the pestilence that walketh in darkness," as these two are mentioned together in Psa. xci. 5, 6; it spreads and infects secretly and insensibly, is not felt but in the effects of it; and it works either by calumnies altogether forged and untrue, of which malice is inventive, or by the advantage of real faults, of which it is very discerning, and these are stretched and aggravated to the utmost. It is not expressible how deep a wound a tongue sharpened to this work will give, with a very little word and little noise,—"as a razor," as it is called in Psa. lii. 2, which with a small touch cuts very deep,—taking things by the worst handle, whereas charity will try about all ways for a good acceptation and sense of things, and takes all by the best. This pest is still killing some almost in all companies; it "casteth down many wounded," as it is said of the strange woman, Prov. vii. 26. And they convey it under fair prefacing of commendation; so giving them poison in wine, both that it may pass the better, and penetrate the more. This is a great sin, one which the Lord ranks with the first, when he sets them in order against a man, "Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother," Psa. l. 20.

III. *Vain fruitless* speeches are an evil of the tongue; not only those they call harmless lies, which some poor people take a pleasure in, and trade much in, light buffooneries and foolish jestings, but the greatest part of those discourses which men account the blameless entertainments one of another, come within the compass of this evil; frothy, unsavoury stuff, tending to no purpose nor good at all; effectless words, ἄργον, as our Saviour speaks, Matt. xii. 36, of which we must render account in the day of judgment, for that very reason. They

are in this world of evil, in the tongue; if no other way ill, yet ill they are, as the Arabian deserts and barren sands, because they are fruitless.

IV. *Doubleness and guile:* so great a part, that it is here particularly named a part, though the evil of it is less known and discerned; and so there is in it, as I may say, much *terra incognita;* yet it is of a very large compass, as large, we may confidently say, as all the other three together. What of men's speech is not manifestly evil in any of the other kinds, is the most of it naught this way: speech good to appearance, plausible and fair, but not upright: not silver, but "silver dross," as Solomon calls it; burning lips, &c., Prov. xxvi. 23. Each almost, some way or other, speaking falsehood and deceit to his neighbour; and daring to act thus falsely with God in his services, and our protestations of obedience to him; religious speeches abused by some in hypocrisy, as holy vestments, for a mask or disguise; doing nothing but "compassing him about with lies," as he complains of Ephraim, Hos. xi. 12, deceiving indeed ourselves, while we think to deceive Him who cannot be deceived, and "will not be mocked," Psa. xvii. 1; Gal. vi. 7. He saw through the disguises and hypocrisy of his own people, when they came to inquire at him, and yet still entertained their heart-idols, as he tells the prophet, Ezek. xiv. 3.

The sins of each of us, would we enter into a strict account of ourselves, would be found to arise to a great sum in this kind; and they that do put themselves upon the work of self-trial, find, no doubt, abundant matter of deepest humbling, though they had no more, even in the sin of their lips, and are by it often astonished at the Lord's patience,

considering his holiness; as Isaiah cried out, ch. vi. 5; having seen the Lord in a glorious vision, this in particular falls upon his thoughts concerning himself and the people—"polluted lips: Woe is me," &c. And indeed it is a thing the godly mind cannot be satisfied with, to make mention of the Lord, till their lips be "touched with a coal from" the heavenly fire of "the altar;" and they especially that are called to be the Lord's messengers, will say as St. Bernard, "Had the prophet need of a coal to unpollute his lips, then do ministers require *totum globum igneum*, 'a whole globe of fire.'" Go through the land, and see if the sins of this kind will not take up much of the bill against us, which the Lord seems now to have taken into his hands and to be reading, and about to take order with it, because we will not. Would we set ourselves to read it, he would let it fall. Is it not because of oaths that "the land mourns," or I am sure hath now high cause to mourn? Mockings at the power of godliness fly thick in most congregations and societies. And what is there to be found almost but mutual detractions and supplantings of the good name of another, "tongues taught to speak lies," Jer. ix. 4, 5, and that frame, or sow and "weave together deceits," as it is in Psa. l. 19. And even the godly, as they may be subject to other sins, so may they be under some degree of this; and too many are very much subject, by reason of their unwatchfulness and not staying themselves in this point, though not to profane, yet to vain, and it may be, to detractive speeches; sometimes possibly not with malicious intention, but out of an inadvertence of this evil, readier to stick on the failings of men, and it may be of other Christians, than to consider, and commend, and follow

what is laudable in them; and it may be in their best discourses, not endeavouring to have hearts purified, as becomes them, from all guile and self-ends. Oh! it is a thing needs much diligent study, and is worth it all, to be thoroughly sincere and unfeigned in all, and particularly in these things. Our Saviour's innocence is expressed so, "In his mouth was found no guile," chap. ii. of this Epist., ver. 22.

But to add something for remedy of these evils in some part discovered; for to vanquish this world of evils is a great conquest.

1. It must begin at the heart; otherwise it will be but a mountebank cure, a false imagined conquest. The weights and wheels are *there*, and the clock strikes according to their motion. Even he that speaks contrary to what is within him, guilefully contrary to his inward conviction and knowledge, yet speaks conformably to what is within him in the temper and frame of his heart, which is double, "a heart and a heart," as the psalmist hath it, Psa. xii. 2. A guileful heart makes guileful tongue and lips. It is the workhouse, where is the forge of deceits and slanders, and other evil speakings; and the tongue is only the outer shop where they are vended, and the lips the door of it; so then such ware as is made within, such and no other can be set out. From evil thoughts, evil speakings; from a profane heart, profane words; and from a malicious heart, bitter or calumnious words; and from a deceitful heart, guileful words, well varnished, but lined with rottenness. And so in the general, "from the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," as our Saviour teaches, Matt. xii. 34. That which the heart is full of, runs over by the tongue: if the heart be full of God, the tongue will delight to speak of him; much

of heavenly things within, will sweetly breathe forth something of their smell by the mouth; and if nothing but earth is there, all that man's discourse will have an earthly smell; and if nothing but wind, vanity, and folly, the speech will be airy, and vain, and purposeless. "The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom:—the law of his God is in his heart," Psa. xxxvii. 30, 31. "Thy law," says David, "is within my heart," Psa. xl. 8; or, as the Hebrew phrase is, "in the midst of my bowels;" and that, as from the centre, sends forth the lines and rays of suitable words, and "I will not, cannot refrain," as there it is added, "I have preached righteousness: lo, I have not refrained my lips," ver. 9. So no more can the evil heart "refrain the tongue from evil," as here is directed. "The tongue of the righteous," says Solomon, "is as fine silver, but the heart of the wicked is little worth," Prov. x. 20. It makes the antithesis "in the root;" his heart is little worth, and therefore his tongue has no silver in it; he may be worth thousands, as we speak, that is, indeed, in his chests or lands, and yet himself, his heart, and all the thoughts of it, not worth a penny.

If thou art inured to oaths or cursing, in any kind or fashion of it, taking the great "name of God" any ways "in vain," do not favour thyself in it as a small offence: to excuse it by custom is to wash thyself with ink; and to plead that thou art long practised in that sin, is to accuse thyself deeper. If thou wouldst indeed be delivered from it, think not that a slight dislike of it, when reproved, will do; but seek for a due knowledge of the majesty of God, and thence a deep reverence of him in thy heart; and that will certainly cure that habituated evil of thy tongue; will quite alter that bias which the

custom thou speakest of hath given it; will cast it in a new mould, and teach it a new language; will turn thy regardless abuse of that name, by vain oaths and asseverations, into a holy frequent use of it in prayers and praises. Thou wilt not then dare dishonour that blessed name, which saints and angels bless and adore; but wilt set in with them to bless it.

None that know the weight of that name will dally with it, and "lightly lift it up;" as that phrase translated "taking in vain," in the third commandment, signifies; they that do continue to lift it up in vain, as it were, to sport themselves with it, will find the weight of it falling back upon them, and crushing them to pieces.

In like manner, a purified heart will unteach the tongue all filthy impure speeches, and will give it a holy strain; and the spirit of charity and humility will banish that mischievous humour, which sets so deep in the most, of reproaching and disgracing others in any kind either openly or secretly. For it is wicked self-love and pride of heart, whence these do spring, searching and disclosing the failings of others, on which love will rather cast a mantle to hide them.

It is an argument of a candid, ingenuous mind, to delight in the good name and commendation of others; to pass by their defects, and take notice of their virtues; and to speak and hear of those willingly, and not endure either to speak or hear of the other; for in this indeed you may be little less guilty than the evil speaker, in taking pleasure in it, though you speak it not. And this is a piece of men's natural perverseness, to drink in tales and calumnies;* and he that doth this, will readily, from the delight

* Obtrectatio et livor primis auribus accipiuntur.

he hath in hearing, slide insensibly into the humour of evil speaking. It is strange how most persons dispense with themselves in this point, and that in scarcely any societies shall we find a hatred of this ill, but rather some tokens of taking pleasure in it; and until a Christian sets himself to an inward watchfulness over his heart, not suffering in it any thought that is uncharitable, or vain self-esteem, upon the sight of others' frailties, he will still be subject to somewhat of this, in the tongue or ear at least. So, then, as for the evil of guile in the tongue, a sincere heart, "truth in the inward parts," powerfully redresses it; therefore it is expressed, "That speaketh the truth from his heart," Psa. xv. 2, thence it flows. Seek much after this, to speak nothing with God, nor men, but what is the sense of a single, unfeigned heart. O sweet truth! excellent but rare sincerity! He who loves that truth within, alone can work it there; seek it of him.

2. Be choice in your society. "Sit not with vain persons," Psa. xxvi. 4, whose tongues have nothing else to utter, but impurity, or malice, or folly. Men readily learn the dialect and tone of the people amongst whom they live. If you sit down in the chair of scorners, if you take a seat with them, you shall quickly take a share of their diet with them, and sitting amongst them, take your turn, in time, of speaking with them in their own language. But frequent the company of grave and godly persons, in whose hearts and lips piety, and love, and wisdom are set, and it is the way to learn their language.

3. Use a little of the bridle in the quantity of speech.* Incline a little rather to sparing than lavishing, for "in many words there wants not sin."

* Χωρὶς τὸ τ' ειπειν πολλὰ καὶ τῷ καίρια. ÆSCHYL.

That flux of the tongue, that prating and babbling disease, is very common; and hence so many impertinencies, yea, so many of those worse ills in their discourses, whispering about, and inquiring, and censuring this and that. A childish delight! and yet most men carry it with them all along to speak of persons and things that do not concern them.* And this draws men to speak many things which agree not with the rules of wisdom, and charity, and sincerity. "He that refraineth his lips is wise," saith Solomon, Prov. x. 19; a vessel without a cover cannot escape uncleanness. Much might be avoided by a little refraining of this; much of the infection and sin that are occasioned by the many babblings that are usual. And were it no worse, is it not a sufficient evil, that they waste away that time, precious time, which cannot be recovered, which the most just or most thankful man in the world cannot restore? He that spares speech, "favours his tongue," indeed, as the Latin phrase is [*favere linguæ*]; not he that looses the reins and lets it run. He that refrains his lips, may ponder and pre-examine what he utters, whether it be profitable and seasonable or not; and so the tongue of the just is as "fined silver," Prov. x. 20, it is refined in the wise forethought and pondering of the heart; according to the saying, *Bis ad limam priusquam semel ad linguam*, "Twice to the file ere once to the tongue." Even to utter knowledge and wise things profusely, holds not of wisdom, and a little usually makes most noise; as the Hebrew proverb is, *Stater in lagena bis bis clamat*, "A penny in an earthen pot keeps a great sound and tinkling."

* Οὐδὲν οὕτως ἡδυ τοῖς ἄνθρώποις ὡς τὸ λαλειν τὰ ἀλλώτρια

Certainly it is the way to have much inward peace, to be wary in this point. Men think to have solace by much free, unbounded discourse with others, and when they have done, they find it otherwise, and sometimes contrary. He is wise that hath learned to speak little with others, and much with himself and with God. How much might be gained for our souls, if we would make a right use of this silence! So David, dumb to men, found his tongue to God, Psa. xxxviii. 13, 15. A spiritually-minded man is quickly weary of other discourse, but of that which he loves and wherewith his affection is possessed and taken up. *Grave æstimant quicquid illud non sonat quod intus amant.* And by experience, a Christian will find it, when the Lord is pleased to show him most favour in prayer or other spiritual exercise, how unsavoury it makes other discourses after it; as they who have tasted something singularly sweet, think other things that are less sweet altogether tasteless and unpleasant.

4. In the use of the tongue, when thou dost speak, divert it from evil and guile, by a habit of and delight in profitable and gracious discourse. Thus St. Paul makes the opposition, Eph. iv. 29, Let there be no "rotten communication," (σαπρὸς λογὸς,) and yet he urges not total silence neither, but enjoins such speech "as may edify and administer grace to the hearers." Now in this we should consider, to the end such discourses may be more fruitful, both what is the true end of them, and the right means suiting it. They are not only, nor principally, for the learning of some new things, or the canvassing of debated questions, but their chief good is the warming of the heart; stirring up in it love to God, and remembrance of our present and

after estate, our mortality and immortality, and extolling the ways of holiness, and the promises and comforts of the gospel, and the excellency of Jesus Christ; and in these sometimes one particular, sometimes another, as our particular condition requires, or any occasion makes them pertinent. Therefore, in these discourses, seek not so much either to vent thy knowledge, or to increase it, as to know more spiritually and effectually what thou dost know. And in this way those mean, despised truths, that every one thinks he is sufficiently seen in, will have a new sweetness and use in them, which thou didst not so well perceive before, (for these flowers cannot be sucked dry,) and in this humble sincere way thou shalt "grow in grace and in knowledge" too.

There is no sweeter entertainment than for travellers to be remembering their country, their blessed home, and the happiness abiding them there, and to be refreshing and encouraging one another in the hopes of it; strengthening their hearts against all the hard encounters and difficulties in the way; often overlooking this moment, and helping each other to higher apprehensions of that vision of God which we expect.

And are not such discourses much more worthy the choosing, than the base trash we usually fill one another's ears withal? Were our tongues given us to exchange folly and sin? or were they not framed for the glorifying of God, and therefore are called "our glory?" Some take the expression for the soul; but they must be one in this work, and then, indeed, are both our tongues and our souls truly our glory, when they are busied in exalting his, and are tuned together to that. "That my glory may sing

praise to thee, and not be silent," Psa. xxx. 12. Instead of calumnies, and lies, and vanities, the carrion which flies—base minds—feed on, to delight in divine things and extolling of God, is for "a man to eat angels' food." An excellent task for the tongue is that which David chooseth, "And my tongue shall speak of thy righteousness, and of thy praise all the day long," Psa. xxxv. 28. Were the day ten days long, no vacant room for any unholy, or offensive, or feigned speech! And they lose not, who love to speak praise to Him, for he loves to speak peace to them! and, instead of the world's vain tongue-liberty, to have such intercourse and discourse, is no sad melancholy life, as the world mistakes it.

Ver. 11. Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it.

This is a full and complete rule; but it is our miserable folly, to mistake so far, as to embrace evil under the notion of good; and not only contrary to the nature of the thing, but contrary to our own experience, still to be pursuing that which is still flying farther off from us, catching at a vanishing shadow of delight, with nothing to fasten upon but real guiltiness and misery. Childish minds! we have been so often gulled, and yet never grow wiser, still bewitched and deluded with dreams: "A deceived heart" (a mocked or deluded heart) "hath turned him aside," Isa. xliv. 20. When we think that we are surest, have that hand that holds fastest, our right hand, upon some good, and that now surely we are sped,—even then it proves "a lie in our right hand," slips through as a handful of air, and proves nothing; promises fair, but doth only mock us; as

the same word is used by Jacob, Gen. xxxi. 7, expressing the unfaithfulness of his uncle who changed his wages so often; yet still we foolishly and madly trust it! When it makes so gross a lie, that we might easily, if we took it to the light, see through it, being a lie so often discovered, and of known falsehood, yet, some new dream or disguise makes it pass with us again, and we go round in that mill, having our eyes put out, like Samson, and still we are where we were, engaged in perpetual fruitless toil. Strange! that the base, deceitful lusts of sin should still keep their credit with us! but "the beast hath a false prophet" at his side, Rev. xix. 20, to commend him and set him off with new inventions, and "causes us to err by his lies," as it is said of the false prophets, Jer. xxiii. 32. But evil it is still; not only void of all good, but the very deformity and debasement of the soul; defacing in it the Divine image of its Maker, and impressing on it the vile image of Satan. And then, further, it is attended with shame and sorrow: even at the very best, "it is a sowing of the wind;" there is no solid good in it; and withal a "reaping of the whirlwind," vexations and horrors, Hos. viii. 7. They that know it under a sense of this after-view, as attended with the wrath of an offended God,—ask them what they think of it; whether they would not, in those thoughts, choose any trouble or pain though ever so great, rather than willingly to adventure on the ways of sin.

Obedience is that good, that beauty and comeliness of the soul, that conformity with the holy will of God, that hath peace and sweetness in it; the hardest exercise of it is truly delightful even at present, and hereafter it shall fully be so. Would we

but learn to consider it thus, to know sin to be the greatest evil, and the holy will of God the highest good, it would be easy to persuade and prevail with men to comply with this advice, to eschew the one, and do the other.

These do not only reach the actions, but require an intrinsical aversion of the heart from sin, and a propension to holiness and the love of it.

"Eschew." The very motion and bias of the soul must be turned from sin, and carried towards God. And this is principally to be considered by us, and inquired after within us,—"an abhorrence of that which is evil," as the Scripture speaks, Rom. xii. 9; not a simple forbearing, but hating and loathing it, and this springing from the love of God. "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil," says the psalmist, Psa. xcvii. 10. You will do so, cannot choose but do so; and so may you know that love to him to be upright and true.

And where this love is, the avoidance of sin, and walking in holiness, or doing good, will be, 1. More constant, not wavering with the variation of outward circumstances, of occasion, or society, or secrecy, but going on in its natural course; as the sun is as far from the earth and goes as fast under a cloud, as when it is in our sight, and goes cheerfully, because from a natural principle it "rejoiceth as a strong man to run," Psa. xix. 5; such is the obedience of a renewed mind. And, 2. More universal, as proceeding from an abhorrence of all sin; as natural antipathies are against the whole kind of any thing. 3. More exact, keeping afar off from the very appearances of sin, and from all the inducements and steps towards it. And this is the true way of eschewing it.

Not a little time of constrained forbearance during a night, or the day of participating of the communion, or a little time before, and some few days after such services; for thus, with the most, sin is not dispossessed and cast out, but retires inward and lurks in the heart. Being beset with those ordinances, it knows they last but awhile, and therefore it gets into its strength, and keeps close there, till they be out of sight and disappear again, and be a good way off, so that it thinks itself out of their danger, a good many days having passed, and then it comes forth and returns to exert itself with liberty, yea, it may be, with more vigour, as it were to regain the time it hath been forced to lose and lie idle in.

They again miss of the right manner of this eschewing, who think themselves, possibly, somebody in it, in that they do avoid the gross sins wherein the vulgar sort of sinners wallow, or do eschew such evils as they have little or no inclination of nature to. But where the heart stands against sin, as a breach of God's law and an offence against his majesty, as Joseph, Shall I do this evil, and sin against God? Gen. xxxix. 9, there, it will carry a man against all kind of sin, the most refined and the most beloved sin, wherein the truth of this aversion is most tried and approved. As they who have a strong natural dislike of some kind of meat, dress it as you will, and mingle it with what they love best, yet will not willingly eat of it; and if they be surprised and deceived some way to swallow some of it, yet they will discover it afterwards, and be restless till they have cast it up again: thus it is with the heart which hath that inward contrariety to sin wrought in it by a new nature; it will consent

to no reconcilement with it, nor with any kind of it; as in those deadly feuds which were against whole families and names without exception. The renewed soul will "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness," as the apostle speaks, Eph. v. 11. For "what agreement is there betwixt light and darkness?" 2 Cor. vi. 14. And this hatred of sin works most against sin in a man's self; as in things we abhor, our reluctance rises most when they are nearest us. A godly man hates sin in others, as hateful wheresoever it is found; but because it is nearest him in himself, he hates it most there. They who by their nature and breeding are somewhat delicate, like not to see any thing uncleanly any where, but least of all in their own house, and upon their own clothes or skin. This makes the godly man, indeed, flee not only the society of evil men, but from himself; he goes out of his old self; and till this be done, a man does not indeed flee sin, but carries it still with him as an evil companion, or an evil guide rather, that misleads him still from the paths of life. And there is much, first in the true discovery, and then in the thorough disunion of the heart from that sin which is most of all a man's self, that from which he can with the greatest difficulty escape, that besets him the most, εὐπερίστατος, Heb. xii. 1, and lieth in his way on all hands, hath him at every turn: to disengage oneself and get free from that, to eschew that evil, is difficult indeed. And the task in this is the harder, if this evil be, as oftentimes it may be, not some gross sin, but one more subtle, less seen, and therefore not so easily avoided; but for this an impartial search must be used: if it be amongst those things that seem most necessary, and that cannot be dispensed

with, an idol hid amongst the stuff, yet thence must it be drawn forth and cast out.

The right eschewing of evil, involves a wary avoidance of all occasions and beginnings of it. "Flee from sin," says the wise man, "as from a serpent." We are not to be tampering with it, and coming near it, and thinking to charm it; "For," as one says, "who will not laugh at the charmer that is bitten by a serpent?" He that thinks he hath power and skill to handle it without danger, let him observe Solomon's advice concerning the strange woman; he says not only, "Go not into her house," but, "Remove thy way far from her, and come not near the door of her house," Prov. v. 8. So teaches he wisely for the avoiding of that other sin near to it, "Look not on the wine when it is red in the cup," Prov. xxiii. 31. They that are bold and adventurous, are often wounded: thus, "He that removeth stones shall be hurt thereby," Eccl. x. 9. If we know our own weakness and the strength of sin, we shall fear to expose ourselves to hazards, and be willing even to abridge ourselves of some things lawful when they prove dangerous; for he that will do always all he lawfully may, shall often do something that lawfully he may not.

Thus for the other, "do good," the main thing is, to be inwardly principled for it; to have a heart stamped with the love of God and his commandments; to do all for conscience of his will, and love to him, and desire of his glory. A good action, even the best kind of actions, in an evil hand, and from an evil, unsanctified heart, passes amongst evils. "Delight in the Lord," and in his ways. David's "Oh! how love I thy law!" Psa. cxix. 97, tells that he esteems it above the richest and plea-

santest things on earth, but how much he esteems and loves it he cannot express.

And upon this will follow (as observed in regard to eschewing evil) a constant track and course of obedience, moving directly contrary to the stream of wickedness about a man, and also against the bent of his own corrupt heart within him; a serious desire and endeavour to do all the good that is within our calling and reach, but especially that particular good of our calling, that which "is in our hand," and is peculiarly required of us. For in this some deceive themselves; they look upon such a condition as they imagine were fit for them, or such as is in their eye when they look upon others, and they think if they were such persons, and had such a place, and such power and opportunities, they would do great matters, and in the mean time they neglect that good to which they are called, and which they have in some measure power and place to do. This is the roving, sickly humour of our minds, and speaks their weakness; as sick persons would still change their bed, or posture, or place of abode, thinking to be better. But a staid mind applies itself to the duties of its own station, and seeks to glorify him who set it there, reverencing his wisdom in disposing of it so. And there is certainty of a blessed approbation of this conduct. Be thy station ever so low, it is not the high condition, but much fidelity secures it: "Thou hast been faithful in little," Luke xix. 17. We must care not only to answer occasions, when they call, but to catch at them, and seek them out; yea, to frame occasions of doing good, whether in the Lord's immediate service, delighting in that, private and public, or in doing good to men, in assisting one with our means, another

with our admonitions, another with counsel or comfort as we can; labouring not only to have something of that good which is most contrary to our nature, but even to be eminent in that, setting Christian resolution, and both the example and strength of our Lord, against all oppositions, and difficulties, and discouragements: "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith," Heb. xii. 2.

We see, then, our rule, and it is the rule of peace and happiness; what hinders but we apply our hearts to it? This is our work, and setting aside the advantage that follows, consider the thing in itself: 1. The opposition of sin and obedience, under the name of "evil" and "good;" 2. The composition of our rule in these expressions, "eschew" and "do." Consider it thus—evil and good, and it will persuade us to eschew and do.

And if you are persuaded to it, then, 1. Desire light from above, to discover to you what is evil and offensive to God in any kind, and what pleaseth him, what is his will; (for that is the rule and reason of good in our actions, "that ye may prove what is the good, and holy, and acceptable will of God," Rom. xii. 2;) and to discover in yourselves what is most adverse and repugnant to that will. 2. Seek a renewed mind to hate that evil, even such as is the closest and most connatural to you, and to love that good, even that which is most contrary. 3. Seek strength and skill, that, by another Spirit than your own, you may "avoid evil, and do good," and resist the incursions and solicitings of evil, the artifices and violences of Satan, who is both a "serpent" and a "lion;" and seek for power against your own inward corruption, and the fallacies of your own heart. And thus you shall be able for "every good work,"

and be kept, in such a measure as suits your present estate, "blameless in spirit, soul, and body, to the coming of Jesus Christ," 1 Thess. v. 23.

"Oh! but," says the humble Christian, "I am often entangled and plunged in soul-evils, and often frustrated in my thoughts against these evils, and in my aims at the good, which is my task and duty."

And was not this Paul's condition? May you not complain in his language? And happy will you be, if you do so with some measure of his feeling; happy in crying out of wretchedness! Was not this his malady, "When I would do good, evil is present with me?" Rom. vii. 21. But know at once, that though thy duty is this, to eschew evil and do good, yet thy salvation is more surely founded than on thine own good. That perfection which answers to justice and the law, is not required of thee. Thou art to "walk, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit;" but in so walking, whether in a low or a high measure, still thy comfort lieth in this, that "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus," as the apostle begins the next chapter (Rom. viii.) after his sad complaints. Again, consider his thoughts in the close of the viith chapter, on perceiving the work of God in himself, and distinguishing that from the corrupt motions of nature, and so finding at once matter of heavy complaint, and yet of cheerful exultation: "O! wretched man that I am!" and yet with the same breath, "Thanks to God, through Christ Jesus our Lord."

So, then, mourn with him, and yet rejoice with him, and go on with courage as he did, still "fighting the good fight of faith." When thou fallest in the mire, be ashamed and humbled, yet return and wash in "the fountain opened," and return and beg new strength to walk more surely. Learn to trust

thyself less, and God more, and up and be doing against thy enemies, how tall and mighty soever be the sons of Anak. "Be of good courage," and the Lord shall be with thee, and "shall strengthen thy heart," and establish thy goings.

Do not lie down to rest upon lazy conclusions, that it is well enough with thee, because thou art out of the common puddle of profaneness; but look further, to "cleanse thyself from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God," 2 Cor. vii. 1. Do not think thy little is enough, or that thou hast reason to despair of attaining more, but press, press hard "toward the mark and prize of thy high calling," Phil. iii. 14. Do not think all is lost, because thou art at present foiled. *Novit se sæpe vicisse post sanguinem*, says Seneca: "The experienced soldier knows that he hath often won the day after a fall, or a wound received;" and be assured, that after the short combats of a moment, follows an eternity of triumph.

"Let him seek peace, and ensue it." Omitting the many acceptations of the word *peace*, here particularly external peace with men, I conceive, is meant; and this is to be sought, and not only to be sought when it is willingly found, but we are to pursue and follow it when it seems to fly away; but yet, so to pursue it, as never to step out of the way of holiness and righteousness after it, and to forsake this rule that goes before it, of "eschewing evil, and doing good." Yea, mainly in so doing is peace to be sought and pursued, and it is most readily to be found and overtaken in that way: for "the fruit of righteousness is peace," James iii. 18.

1. Consider that an unpeaceable, turbulent disposition is the badge of a wicked mind; "as the

raging sea, still casting up mire and dirt," Isa. lvii. 20. But this love of peace, and in all good ways seeking and pursuing it, is the true character of the children of God, who is "the God of peace." True, the ungodly (to prevent their own just challenge, as Ahab) call the friends of true religion, disturbers, and the "troublers of Israel," 1 Kings xviii. 17, and this will still be their impudence: but, certainly, they "that love the welfare of Jerusalem, do seek, and pray for," and work for "peace" all they can, as a chief blessing, and the fruitful womb of multitudes of blessings.

2. Consider, then, that to be deprived of peace is a heavy judgment, and calls for our prayers and tears to pursue it and entreat its return; calls us to seek it from His hand who is the sovereign Dispenser of peace and war, to seek to "be at peace with him, and thereby good, all good, shall come unto us," Job xxii. 21; and particularly this great good of outward peace in due time; and the very judgment of war shall in the event be turned into a blessing. We may pursue it amongst men, and not overtake it; we may use all good means, and fall short; but pursue it up as far as the throne of grace, seek it by prayer, and that will overtake it, will be sure to find it in God's hand, "who stilleth the waves of the sea, and the tumults of the people. If he give quietness, who then can disturb?" Psa. lxv. 7; Job xxxiv. 29.

"He that will love life." This is the attractive, —"life." "Long life, and days of good," is the thing men most desire; for if they be evil days, then so much the worse that they be long, and the shortest of such seem too long; and if short, being good, this cuts off the enjoyment of that good: but

these two complete the good, and suit it to men's wishes, length and prosperity of life.

It is here supposed that all would be happy, that all desire it, being carried to that by nature, to seek their own good: but he that "will love it," which means here, that will wisely love it, that will take the way to it, and be true to his desire, "must refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile; he must eschew evil, and do good, seek peace, and ensue it." You desire to see good days, and yet hinder them by sinful provocations; you desire good clear days, and yet cloud them by your guiltiness.

Thus many desire good here, yea, and confusedly desire the good of the life to come, because they hear it is life, and long life, and that good is to be found in it, yea, nothing but good: but in this is our folly, we will not love it wisely. The face of our desire is towards it, but in our course we are rowing from it down into the dead sea. You would all have better times, peace and plenty, and freedom from the molestation and expense of our present condition: why will you not be persuaded to seek it in the true way of it?

But how is this? Do not the righteous often pass their days in distress and sorrow, so as to have "few and evil days," as Jacob speaks, Gen. xlvii. 9? Yet is there a truth in this promise, annexing outward good things to godliness, as having the promise of this life, and that which is to come, 1 Tim. iv. 8. And it is so accomplished to them, when the Lord sees it convenient and conducive to their highest good: but that he most aims at, and they themselves do most desire; and therefore, if the abatement of outward good, either as to the length or

sweetness of this life, serve his main end and theirs better, they are agreed upon this gainful commutation of good for infinitely better.

The life of a godly man, though short in comparison of the utmost of nature's course, yet may be long in value, in respect of his activity and attainment to much spiritual good. He may be said to live much in a little time; whereas they that wear out their days in folly and sin, *diu vivunt sed parum*, "they live long, but little;" or, as the same writer again speaks, *non diu vixit, diu fuit*, "he lived not long, but existed long." And the good of the godly man's days, though unseen good, surpasses all the world's mirth and prosperity, which makes a noise, but is hollow within, as the "crackling of thorns," a great sound, but little heat, and quickly done. As St. Augustine says of Abraham, he had *dies bonos in Deo, licet malos in seculo*, "good days in God, though evil days in his generation;" a believer can make up an ill day with a good God, and enjoying him, he hath solid peace. But then that which is abiding, that length of days, and that dwelling in the house of God in that length of days, is what "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard," &c., 1 Cor. ii. 9. They are, indeed, good days, or rather one everlasting day, which has "no need of the sun, nor of the moon," but immediately flows from the first and increated Light, "the Father of lights;" his glory shines in it, "and the Lamb is the light thereof."

Ver. 12. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

The wisest knowledge of things is, to know them

in their causes; but there is no knowledge of causes so happy and useful, as clearly to know and firmly to believe the universal dependence of all things upon the first and highest Cause, the Cause of causes, the Spring of being and goodness, the wise and just Ruler of the world.

This the psalmist, Psa. xxxiv. 15, 16, as here with him the apostle, gives as the true reason of that truth they have averred in the former words, the connexion of holiness and happiness. If life, and peace, and all good be in God's hand to bestow when it pleaseth him, then surely the way to it is an obedient and regular walking in observance of his will; and the way of sin is the way to ruin: "For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, &c., and his face is against them that do evil."

In the words there is a double opposition; of persons, and of their portion.

1. Of persons, the "righteous" and "evil-doers." These two words are often used in the Scriptures, and particularly in the Book of Psalms, to express the godly and the wicked; and so this righteousness is not absolute perfection or sinlessness, nor is the opposed evil every act of sin, or breach of God's law: but the righteous are they that are students of obedience and holiness, that desire to walk as in the sight of God, and to "walk with God," as Enoch did; that are glad when they can any way serve him, and grieved when they offend him; that feel and bewail their unrighteousness, and are earnestly breathing and advancing forward; have a sincere and unfeigned love to all the commandments of God, and diligently endeavour to observe them; that vehemently hate what most pleases their corrupt nature, and love the command that crosses it

most; this is an imperfect kind of perfection. See Phil. iii. 12, 15.

On the other side, evil-doers are they that commit sin with greediness; that walk in it, make it their way; that live in sin as their element, "taking pleasure in unrighteousness," as the apostle speaks, 2 Thess. ii. 12: their great faculty, their great delight lies in sin; they are skilful and cheerful evil-doers. Not any one man in all kind of sins; that is impossible; there is a concatenation of sin, and one disposes and induces to another; but yet one ungodly man is commonly more versed in and delighted with some one kind of sin; another with some other. He forbears none because it is evil and hateful to God, but as he cannot travel over the whole globe of wickedness, and go the full circuit, he walks up and down in his accustomed way of sin. No one mechanic is good at all trades, nor is any man expert in all arts; but he is an evil-doer that follows the particular trade of the sin he hath chosen, is active and diligent in that, and finds it sweet. In a word, this opposition lieth mainly in the bent of the affection, or in the way it is set. The godly man hates the evil he possibly by temptation hath been drawn to do, and loves the good he is frustrated of, and, having intended, hath not attained to do. The sinner who hath his denomination from sin as his course, hates the good which sometimes he is forced to do, and loves that sin which many times he does not, either wanting occasion and means, so that he cannot do it, or through the check of an enlightened conscience, possibly dares not do; and though so bound up from the act, as a dog in a chain, yet the habit, the natural inclination and desire in him, is still the same, the strength

of his affection is carried to sin. So in the weakest godly man, there is that predominant sincerity and desire of holy walking, according to which he is called a righteous person; the Lord is pleased to give him that name, and account him so, being upright in heart, though often failing. There is a righteousness of a higher strain, upon which his salvation hangs; that is not in him, but upon him; he is clothed with it: but this other kind, which consists of sincerity, and of true and hearty, though imperfect obedience, is the righteousness here meant, and opposed to evil-doing.

2. Their opposite condition, or portion, is expressed in the highest notion of it, that wherein the very being of happiness and misery lieth, the favour and anger of God. As their natures differ most by the habit of their affection towards God, as their main distinguishing character, so the difference of their estate consists in the point of his affection towards them, expressed here, in our language, by the divers aspects of his countenance; because our love or hatred usually looks out and shows itself that way.

Now for the other word expressing his favour to the righteous, by "the openness of his ear,"—the opposition in the other needed not be expressed; for either the wicked pray not, or if they do, it is indeed no prayer, the Lord doth not account or receive it as such; and if his face be set against them, certainly his ear is shut against them too, and so shut that it openeth not to their loudest prayer. "Though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them," says the Lord, Ezek. viii. 18.

And before we pass to the particulars of their

condition, as here we have them described, this we would consider a little, and apply it to our present business—Who are the persons whom the Lord thus regards, and to whose prayer he opens his ear.

This we pretend to be seeking after, that the Lord would look favourably upon us, and hearken to our suits, for ourselves, and this land, and the whole church of God within these kingdoms. Indeed, "the fervent prayer of a faithful man availeth much" [πολὺ ἰσχύει]; it is of great strength, a mighty thing, that can bind and loose the influences of heaven, as there is instanced, James v. 16; and if the prayer of a righteous man, be it but of one righteous man, how much more the combined cries of many of them together! And that we judge not the righteousness there and here mentioned to be a thing above human estate, Elias, says the apostle, "was a man," and "a man subject to like passions as we are," and yet such a righteous person as the Lord had an eye and gave ear to in so great a matter. But where are those righteous fasters and prayers in great congregations? How few, if any, are to be found, who are such but in the lowest sense and measure, real lovers and inquirers after holiness! What are our meetings here, but assemblies of evil-doers, rebellious children, ignorant and profane persons, or dead, formal professors? and so, the more of us, the worse, incensing the Lord the more; and the multitude of prayers, though we could and would continue many days, all to no purpose from such as we. "Though ye make many prayers, when ye multiply prayer, I will not hear: and when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you," Isa. i. 11. Your hands are so filthy, that if you would follow me to lay hold of me with them, you

drive me further off; as one with foul hands following a person that is neat, to catch hold of him; and "if you spread them out before me," my eyes are pure, you will make me turn away; I cannot endure to look upon them, "I will hide mine eyes from you." And fasting, added with prayer, will not do it, nor make it pass. "When they fast, I will not hear their cry," Jer. xiv. 12.

It is the sin of his people that provokes him, instead of looking favourably upon them, to have "his eyes upon them for evil, and not for good," as he threatens, Amos ix. 4; and therefore, without the putting away of that, prayer is lost breath, doth no good.

They that still retain their sins, and will not hearken to his voice, how can they expect but that justly threatened retaliation, Prov. i. 26, 28, and that the Lord, in holy scorn, in the day of their distress, should send them for help and comfort to those things which they have made their gods, and preferred before him in their trouble? "They will say, Arise, and save us: but where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble," Jer. ii. 27, 28.

And not only do open and gross impieties thus disappoint our prayers, but the lodging of any sin in our affection. "If I regard iniquity in my heart," says the psalmist, "the Lord will not hear my voice," Psa. lxvi. 18. The word is, "If I see iniquity;" if mine eye look pleasantly upon it, his will not look so upon me, nor shall I find his ear so ready and open. He says not, If I do sin, but, "If I regard it in my heart." The heart's entertaining and embracing a sin, though it be a smaller sin, is more than the simple falling into sin. And as the ungodly do for this reason lose all their prayers, a

godly man may suffer this way, in some degree, upon some degree of guiltiness. The heart being seduced, it may be, and entangled for a time by some sinful lust, Christians are sure to find a stop in their prayers, that they neither go nor come so quickly and so comfortably as before. Any sinful humour, as rheums do our voice, binds up the voice of prayer, makes it not so clear and shrill as it was wont; and the accusing guilt of it ascending, shuts up the Lord's ear, that he doth not so readily hear and answer as before. And thus that sweet correspondence is interrupted, which all the delights of the world cannot compensate. If, then, you would have easy and sweet accesses to God in prayer—

1. Seek a holy heart: entertain a constant care and study of holiness; admit no parley with sin; do not so much as hearken to it, if you would be readily heard.

2. Seek a broken heart: the Lord is ever at hand to that, as it is in Psa. xxxiv., whence the apostle cites the words now under our consideration, "He is nigh to them that are of a contrite spirit," ver. 18, &c.; it is an excellent way to prevail. The breaking of the heart multiplies petitioners; every piece of it hath a voice, and a very strong and very moving voice, that enters his ear, and stirs the bowels and compassions of the Lord towards it.

3. Seek an humble heart: that may present its suit always; the court is constantly there, even within it; the great King loves to make his abode and residence in it, Isa. lvii. 15. This is the thing that the Lord so delights in and requires; he will not fail to accept of it; it is his choice: "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord? &c. He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord

require of thee, but to do justly, and love mercy?" Mic. vi. 7, 8. There is this righteousness, and that as a great part making it up, "to walk humbly with thy God;" in the original, "humble to walk with thy God;" he cannot agree with a proud heart; he hates, resists it; and "two cannot walk together unless they be agreed," as the prophet speaks, Amos iii. 3. The humble heart only is company for God, hath liberty to walk and converse with him. "He gives grace to the humble;" he bows his ear, if thou lift not up thy neck: proud beggars he turns away with disdain, and the humblest suitors always speed best with him. "The righteous," not such in their own eyes, but in his, through his gracious dignation* and acceptance. And is there not reason to come humbly before him? base worms, to the most holy and most high God?

"The eyes of the Lord." We see, 1. That both are in his sight, the righteous and the wicked; all of them, and all their ways. His eye is on the one, and his face on the other, as the word is, but so on these as to be against them. It is therefore rendered as denoting his eye of knowledge and of observance, marking them and their actions, which is equally upon both. "There is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves," Job xxxiv. 22. Foolishly and wretchedly done, to do that, or think that, which we would hide from the Lord, and then to think that we can hide it! The prophet speaks woe to such: "Woe to them that dig deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?" Isa. xxix. 15. And this is the grand principle of all

* Making worthy.

wickedness, not, it may be, expressly stated, but secretly lying in the soul, an habitual forgetting of God and his eye, not considering that he beholds us. "Ye that forget God," says the psalmist, (l. 22,) thence all impiety proceeds; and, on the other side, "the remembrance" of his eye, is a radical point of piety and holiness, in which the cxxxixth Psalm is large and excellent.

But, 2. As the Lord doth thus equally see both, so as that his eye and countenance imports his mind concerning them and towards them, the manner of his beholding them is different, yea, contrary. And from the other—the beholding them in common—knowing their ways—arises this different beholding, which (as usually words of sense signify also the affection, *verba sensus connotant affectus*) is the approving and disliking, the loving and hating them, and their ways: so he peculiarly "knows the righteous" and their "ways," and "knows not, never knew the workers of iniquity," Psa. i. 6; even those that by their profession would plead most acquaintance, and familiar converse, "eating and drinking in his presence," and yet, "I know you not, whence you are," Luke xiii. 26, 27. It is not a breaking off from former acquaintance; no, he doth not that; he disavows none that ever were truly acquainted with him. So the other evangelist hath it, of those that thought to have been in no small account, "I never knew you, depart from me;" and the convincing reason lies in that, "ye workers of iniquity," Matt. vii. 23, none of his favourites and friends are such.

Thus here, his eye, his gracious eye for good, is on the righteous; and his face, his angry looks, his just wrath, against evil-doers.

In Psalm xi. we have this expressed much after the same way. First, what we spoke of God's knowing and beholding in common the righteous and wicked, and their ways, is represented by his "sitting on high," where he may mark, and see clearly throughout all places and all hearts. "His throne is in heaven, his eyes behold, his eyelids try the children of men," ver. 4. He sits in heaven, not as in a chair of rest, regardless of human things, but on a throne for governing and judging; though with as little uneasiness and disturbance, as if there were nothing to be done that way. "His eyes behold," not in a fruitless contemplation or knowledge, but "His eyelids try," which signifies an intent inspection, such as men usually make with a kind of motion of their eyelids. Then upon this is added the different portion of the righteous and wicked, in his beholding them and dealing with them: "The Lord trieth the righteous," ver 5, approves what is good in them, and by trial and affliction doth purge out what is evil; and in both these there is love; "but the wicked, and him that loveth violence, his soul hateth:" and therefore, as here, "His face is against them." His soul and face are all one, but these things are expressed after our manner. He looks upon them with indignation; and thence come the storms in the next verse, "Snares rained down," ver. 6; the wariest foot cannot avoid such snares, they come down upon them from above: "Fire and brimstone, and burning tempest," alluding to Sodom's judgment, as an emblem of the punishment of all the wicked; "this is the portion of their cup." There is a cup for them; but his children drink not with them. They have another cup; "the Lord" himself "is the portion of their cup," Psa. xvi. 5.

As Psalm xii. closes, "The righteous Lord loveth righteousness: his countenance doth behold the upright:" that is another beholding than the former, a gracious, loving beholding; as here, "His eyes are upon the righteous."

Now the persuasion of this truth is the main establishment of a godly mind, amidst all the present confusions that appear in things; and it is so here intended, as well as in the Psalm I have mentioned, and throughout the Scriptures.

To look upon the present flourishing and prosperity of evil-doers, and on the distresses and sorrows of the godly, is a dark, obscure matter in itself; but the way to be cleared and comforted is, to look above them to the Lord. "They looked unto him, and were lightened," Psa. xxxiv. 5. That answers all doubts, to believe this undoubted providence and justice, the eye of God that sees all, yea, rules all these things. And in the midst of all the painted happiness of wicked men, this is enough to make them miserable, "The Lord's face is against them;" and they shall surely find it so. He hath wrath and judgment in store, and "will bring it forth to light," will execute it in due time; he is preparing for them that cup spoken of, and they shall drink it. So, in the saddest condition of his church and a believing soul, to know this, that the Lord's eye is even then upon them, and that he is upon thoughts of peace and love to them, is that which settles and composes the mind. Thus, in that Psalm before cited, it was such difficulties that did drive David's thoughts to that for satisfaction: "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" Psa. xi. 3. In the time of such great shakings and confusions, the righteous man can do nothing to it, but the

righteous Lord can do enough; he can do all. "The righteous Lord that loveth righteousness." While all seems to go upside down, "He is on his throne," he is "trying and judging," and will appear to be Judge. This is the thing that faithful souls should learn to look to, and not lose view and firm belief of, and should desire the Lord himself to raise their minds to it, when they are ready to sink. Natural strength and resolution will not serve the turn; floods may come that will arise above that; something above a man's own spirit must support him: therefore say with David, "When my spirit is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I," Psa. lxi. 2. They think sometimes it is so hard with them, that he regards not; but he assures them of the contrary, "I have graven thee upon the palms of mine hands," Isa. xlix. 16. I cannot look upon my own hands, but I must remember thee: "And thy walls are continually before me." This is what the spouse seeks for, "Set me as a seal upon thine arm," Cant. viii. 6.

Now, a little more particularly to consider the expressions, and their scope here; how is that made good which the former words teach, that they who walk in the ways of wickedness can expect no good, but are certainly miserable? Thus: "The face of the Lord is against them." Prosper they may in their affairs and estates, may have riches, and posterity, and friends, and the world caressing them and smiling on them on all hands; but there is that one thing that damps all, "the face of the Lord is against them." This they feel not indeed for the time; it is an invisible ill, out of sight and out of mind with them; but there is a time of the appearing of "this face of the Lord against them, the

revelation of his righteous judgment," as the apostle speaks, Rom. ii. 5. Sometimes they have precursory days of it here; there is, however, one great prefixed day, "a day of darkness" to them indeed, wherein they shall know what this is, that now sounds so light, "to have the face of the Lord against them." A look of it is more terrible than all present miseries combined together: what then shall the eternity of it be? "to be punished (as the apostle speaks) with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power!" 2 Thess. i. 9.

Are we not then impertinent, foolish creatures, who are so thoughtful how our poor business here succeed with us, and how we are accounted of in the world, and how the faces of men are toward us, and scarcely ever enter into a secret serious inquiry how the countenance of God is to us, whether favourably shining on us, or still angrily "set against us," as it is against all impenitent sinners?

The face of the soul being towards God, turned away from the world and sin, argues for it, that his face is not against it, but that he hath graciously looked upon it, and by a look of love hath drawn it towards himself; for we act not first in that. *Non amatur Deus nisi de Deo:* "There is no love of God but what comes from God." It is he that prevents* us, and by the beams of his love kindles love in our hearts. Now the soul that is thus set towards him, it may be, doth not constantly see here his face shining full and clear upon it, but often clouded; nay, it may be, such a soul hath not yet at all seen it sensibly; yet this it may conclude, "Seeing my desires are towards him, and my chief desire is the

* Goes before.

sweet light of his countenance, though as yet I find not his face shining on me, yet I am persuaded it is not set against me to destroy me." Misbelief, when the soul is much under its influence, and distempered by it, may suggest this sometimes too; but yet still there is some spark of hope that it is otherwise, that the eye of the Lord's pity is even in that estate upon us, and will in time manifest itself to be so.

To the other question, What assurance have the godly for that seeing of good, these blessings you speak of? This is the answer: "The eyes of the Lord are upon them, and his ears open to their prayer." If you think him wise enough to know what is good for them, and rich enough to afford it, they are sure of one thing, he loves them; they have his good will: his heart is towards them, and therefore his eye and his ear. Can they then want any good? If many days and outward good things be indeed good for them, they cannot miss of these. He hath given them already much better things than these, and hath yet far better in store for them; and what way soever the world go with them, this itself is happiness enough, that they are in his love, "whose loving-kindness is better than life," Psa. lxiii. 3. Sweet days have they that live in it. What better days would courtiers wish, than to be still in the eye and favour of the king, to be certain of his good-will towards them, and to know of access and of a gracious acceptance of all their suits? Now thus it is with all the servants of the great King, without prejudice one to another; he is ready to receive their requests, and able and willing to do them all good. Happy estate of a believer! he must not account himself poor and destitute in any condition, for he hath favour at court; he hath the King's eye

and his ear; "the eyes of the Lord are upon him, and his ears open to his prayers."

"The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous." This hath in it, 1. His love, the propension of his heart towards them. The eye is the servant of the affection; it naturally turns that way most, where the heart is. Therefore thus the Lord is pleased to speak of his love to his own. He views still all the world, but he looks upon them with a peculiar delight; his eye is still on them, as it were, turned towards them from all the rest of the world. Though he doth not always let them see these his looks, for it is not said they always are in sight of it; no, not here; yet still, his eye is indeed upon them, attracted by the beauty of grace in them, his own work indeed, the beauty that he himself hath put upon them. And so as to the other, his ear too; he is willing to do for them what they ask; he loves even to hear them speak; finds a sweetness in the voice of their prayers, that makes his ear not only open to their prayers, but desirous of them as sweet music. Thus he speaks of both, "My dove, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice, for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely," Cant. ii. 14.

2. The phrase expresses his good providence and readiness to do them good; to supply their wants, and order their affairs for them; to answer their desires, and thus to let them find the fruits of that love which so leads his eye and ear towards them. "His eye is upon them;" he is devising and thinking what to do for them; it is the thing he thinks on most. His eyes are upon all, but they are busied, as he is pleased to express it, "they run to and fro through the earth, to show himself strong in behalf of them, whose heart is perfect towards him," &c.,

2 Chron. xvi. 9. So Deut. xi. 12, His eyes are all the year on the land. No wonder, then, he answers their suits in what is good for them, when it is still in his thoughts before. "He prevents them with the blessings of his goodness," Psa. xxi. 3; they cannot be so mindful of themselves, as he is of them.

This is an unspeakable comfort, when a poor believer is in great perplexity of any kind in his outward or spiritual condition. "Well, I see no way; I am blind in this, but there are eyes upon me, that see well what is best. The Lord is minding me, and bringing about all to my advantage. 'I am poor and needy indeed, but the Lord thinketh on me,' Psa. xl. 17." That turns the balance. Would not a man, though he had nothing, think himself happy, if some great prince was busily thinking how to advance and enrich him? Much more, if a number of kings were upon this thought, and devising together. Yet "these thoughts might perish," as the psalmist speaks, Psa. cxlvi. 4. How much more solid happiness is it to have Him, whose power is greatest, and whose thoughts fail not, eyeing thee, and devising thy good, and asking, as it were, "What shall be done to the man whom the king will honour?"

"And his ears are open unto their prayer." What suits thou hast, thou mayest speak freely; he will not refuse thee any thing that is for thy good.

"O! but I am not righteous, and all this is for the righteous only." Yet thou wouldst be such a one. Wouldst thou indeed? then in part thou art: as he who modestly and wisely changed the name of wise men into philosophers, lovers of wisdom; art thou not righteous? yet (φιλοδίκαιος) a "lover of

righteousness" thou art; then thou art one of the righteous. If still thine own unrighteousness be in thine eye, it may and should be so, to humble thee; but if it should scare thee from coming unto God, and offering thy suits with this persuasion, that "his ear is open," should it make thee think that his favourable eye is not toward thee, yet there is mercy; creep in under the robe of his Son. Thou art sure "he is Jesus Christ the righteous," and that the Father's eye is on him with delight, and then it shall be so on thee, being in him. Put thy petitions into his hand, who is the great Master of requests; thou canst not doubt that he hath access, and that he hath that ear open to him, which thou thinkest shut to thee.

The exercise of prayer being so important, and bearing so great a part in the life and comfort of a Christian, it deserves to be very seriously considered. We will therefore subjoin some few considerations concerning it.

Prayer may be considered in a threefold notion. 1. As a duty we owe to God. As it is from him we expect and receive all, it is a very reasonable homage and acknowledgment thus to testify the dependence of our being and life on him, and the dependence of our souls upon him, for being, and life, and all good; that we be daily suitors before his throne, and go to him for all. 2. As it constitutes the dignity and the delight of a spiritual mind, to have so near access unto God, and such liberty to speak to him. 3. As a proper and sure means, by Divine appointment and promise, of obtaining at the hands of God those good things that are needful and convenient for us. And although some believers of lower knowledge do not (it may be) so distinctly

know, and others not so particularly consider, all these in it, yet there is a latent notion of them all in the hearts of every godly person, which stirs them and puts them on to the constant use of prayer, and to a love of it.

And as they are in these respects inclined and bent to the exercise of prayer, the Lord's ear is in like manner inclined to hear their prayer in these respects. 1. He takes it well at their hands that they do offer it up as due worship to him, that they desire thus as they can to serve him. He accepts of those offerings graciously, passes by the imperfections in them, and hath regard to their sincere intention and desire. 2. It pleases him well that they delight in prayer, as converse with him; that they love to be much with him, and to speak to him often, and still aspire, by this way, to more acquaintance with him; that they are ambitious of this. 3. He willingly hears their prayers as the expressions of their necessities and desires; being both rich and bountiful, he loves to have blessings drawn out of his hands that way; as full breasts delight to be drawn. The Lord's treasure is always full, and therefore he is always communicative. In the first respect, prayer is acceptable to the Lord "as incense and sacrifice," as David desires, Psa. cxli. 2, the Lord receives it as Divine worship done to him. In the second respect, prayer is as the visits and sweet entertainment and discourse of friends together, and so is pleasing to the Lord, as the free opening of the mind, the "pouring out of the heart to him," as it is called, Psa. lxii. 8, and David, in Psa. v. 1, calls it "his words," and "his meditation;" the word for that signifies discourse or conference. And, in the third sense, the Lord receives prayer as the suits of

petitioners who are in favour with him, and whom he readily accords to. And this the word for "supplication" in the original, and the word here rendered "prayer," and that rendered "cry" in the Psalm, do mean; and in that sense, the Lord's open ear and hearkening hath in it his readiness to answer, as one that doth hear, and to answer graciously and really, as hearing favourably.

I shall now add some directions: I. For prayer, that it may be accepted and answered. II. For observing the answers of it.

I. For prayer. 1. The qualification of the heart that offers it. 2. The way of offering it.

1. As to the qualification of the heart, it must be in some measure, 1. A holy heart, according to that word here, "the righteous." There must be "no regarding iniquity," no entertaining of friendship with any sin, but a permanent love and desire of holiness. Thus, indeed, a man prays within himself, as in a sanctified place, whither the Lord's ear inclines, as of old to the temple. He needs not run superstitiously to a church, &c. *Intra te ora, sed vide prius an sis templum Dei:* "Pray inwardly, but first see whether thou art thyself a temple of God." The sanctified man's body is the "temple of the Holy Ghost," as the apostle speaks, 1 Cor. vi. 19, and his soul is the priest in it that offers sacrifice: both holy to the Lord, consecrated to him. 2. It must be a believing heart, for there is no praying without this. Faith is the very life of prayer, whence spring hope and comfort with it, to uphold the soul, and keep it steady under storms with the promises; and as Aaron and Hur to Moses, keeping it from fainting, strengthening the hands when they would begin to fail. Such is the force of

that word, Psa. x. 17, for the "preparing of the heart" which God gives as an assurance and pledge of his "inclining his ear to hear," signifies the "establishing of the heart;" that, indeed, is a main point of its preparedness, and due disposition for prayer. Now this is done by faith, without which, the soul, as the apostle St. James speaks, is a rolling, unquiet thing, "as a wave of the sea," of itself unstable as the waters, and then "driven with the wind, and tossed" to and fro with every temptation, James i. 6. See and feel thine own unworthiness as much as thou canst, for thou art never bidden to believe in thyself; no, but that is countermanded as faith's great enemy. But what hath thy unworthiness to say against free promises of grace, which are the basis of thy faith? So then believe, that you may pray: this is David's advice, "Trust in him at all times, ye people," and then, "pour out your hearts before him," Psa. lxii. 8. Confide in him as a most faithful and powerful Friend, and then you will open your hearts to him.

2. For the way of offering up prayer. It is a great art, a main part of the secret of religion, to be skilled in it, and of great concern for the comfort and success of it. Much is here to be considered, but for the present take these advices briefly.

(1.) Offer not to speak to God without the heart in some measure seasoned and prepossessed with the sense of his greatness and holiness. And there is much in this; considering wisely to whom we speak, "the King, the Lord of glory," and setting the soul before him, in his presence; and then reflecting on ourselves, and seeing what we are, how wretched, and base, and filthy, and unworthy of such access to so great a Majesty. The want of this "preparing

of the heart" to speak in the Lord's ear, by the consideration of God and ourselves, is that which fills the exercise of prayer with much guiltiness; makes the heart careless, and slight and irreverent, and so displeases the Lord, and disappoints ourselves of that comfort in prayer, and those answers of it, of which otherwise we should have more experience. We rush in before him with any thing, provided we can tumble out a few words; and do not weigh these things, and compose our hearts with serious thoughts and conceptions of God. The soul that studies and endeavours this most, hath much to do to attain to any right apprehensions of him; for how little know we of him! yet should we, at least, set ourselves before him as the purest and greatest Spirit; a being infinitely more excellent than our minds or any creature can conceive. This would fill the soul with awe and reverence, and ballast it, so as to make it go more even through the exercise; to consider the Lord, as that prophet saw him, "sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him, on his right hand and on his left," 1 Kings xxii. 19, and thyself a defiled sinner coming before him, *velut e palude suâ vilis ranuncula*, "as a vile frog creeping out of some pool," as St. Bernard expresses it—how would this fill thee with holy fear! Oh! his greatness and our baseness! and oh! the distance! This is Solomon's advice: "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few," Eccl. v. 2. This would keep us from our ordinary babblings, that heart-nonsense, which, though the words be sense, yet, through the inattention of the heart, are but as impertinent

confused dreams in the Lord's ears; as there it follows, ver. 3.

(2.) When thou addressest thyself to prayer, desire and depend upon the assistance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God; without which thou art not able truly to pray. It is a supernatural work, and therefore the principle of it must be supernatural. He that hath nothing of the Spirit of God, cannot pray at all: he may howl as a beast in his necessity or distress, or may speak words of prayer, as some birds learn the language of men; but pray he cannot. And they that have that Spirit, ought to seek the movings and actual workings of it in them in prayer, as the particular "help of their infirmities," teaching both what to ask, a thing which of ourselves we know not, and then enabling them to ask, breathing forth their desires in such sighs and groans, as are the breath not simply of their own, but of God's Spirit.

(3.) As these two precautions are to be taken before prayer, so, in the exercise of it, you should learn to keep a watchful eye over your own hearts throughout, for every step of the way, that they start not out. And in order to this, strive to keep up a continual remembrance of that presence of God, which, in the entry of the work, is to be set before the eye of the soul. And our endeavour ought to be to fix it upon that view, that it turn not aside nor downwards, but from beginning to end keep sight of Him, who sees and marks whether we do so or not. They that are most inspective and watchful in this, will still be faulty in it; but certainly the less watchful, the more faulty. And this we ought to do, to be aspiring daily to more stability of mind in prayer, and to be driving out somewhat of that roving and

wandering, which is so universal an evil, and certainly so grievous, not to those who have it most, but who observe and discover it most, and endeavour most against it. A strange thing! that the mind, even the renewed mind, should be so ready, not only at other times, but in the exercise of prayer, wherein we peculiarly come so near to God, yet even then to slip out and leave him, and follow some poor vanity or other instead of him! Surely the godly man, when he thinks on this, is exceedingly ashamed of himself, cannot tell what to think of it. "God is exceeding joy," whom, in his right thoughts, he esteems so much above the world and all things in it, yet to use him thus!—when he is speaking to him, to break off from that, and hold discourse, or change a word with some base thought that steps in, and whispers to him; or, at the best, not to be stedfastly minding the Lord to whom he speaks, and possessed with the regard of his presence, and of his business and errand with him.

This is no small piece of our misery here: these wanderings are evidence to us, that we are not at home. But though we should be humbled for this, and still be labouring against it, yet should we not be so discouraged, as to be driven from the work. Satan would desire no better than that; it were to help him to his wish. And sometimes a Christian may be driven to think, "What! shall I still do thus, abusing my Lord's name, and the privilege he hath given me? I had better leave off." No, not so by any means. Strive against the miserable evil that is within thee, but cast not away thy happiness. Be doing still. It is a froward, childish humour, when any thing agrees not to our mind, to throw all away. Thou mayest come off, as Jacob, with "halting"

from thy "wrestlings," and yet obtain "the blessing" for which thou wrestlest.

(4.) Those graces which are the due qualities of the heart, disposing it for prayer in the exercise of it, should be excited and acted, as holiness, the love of it, the desire of increase and growth of it, so, the humbling and melting of the heart, and chiefly faith, which is mainly set on work in prayer, draw forth the sweetnesses and virtues of the promises, teaching us to desire earnestly their performance to the soul, and to believe that they shall be performed; to have before our eyes his goodness and faithfulness who hath promised, and to rest upon that. And for success in prayer, exercising faith in it, it is altogether necessary to interpose the Mediator, and to look through him, and to speak and petition by him who warns us of this, that there is no other way to speed: "No man cometh to the Father but by me," John xiv. 6. As the Jews, when they prayed, looked toward the temple, where was the mercy-seat, and the peculiar presence of God, [Shechinah,] thus ought we in all our praying to look on Christ, who is our "propitiatory," and "in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily," Col. ii. 9. The forgetting of this, may be the cause of our many disappointments.

(5.) Fervency; not to seek coldly: that presages refusal. There must be fire in the sacrifice, otherwise it ascends not. There is no sacrifice without incense, and no incense without fire. Our remiss, dead hearts are not likely to do much for the church of God, nor for ourselves. Where are those strong cries that should pierce the heavens? "His ear is open to their cry." He hears the faintest, coldest prayer, but not with that delight and propenseness

to grant it; his ear is not on it, as the word there is, Psa. lv. 17, he takes no pleasure in hearing it; but cries, heart-cries, oh! these take his ear, and move his compassion; for these are the voice, the cries of his own children. A strange word of encouragement to importunity is that, "Give him no rest," Isa. lxii. 7, suffer him not to be in quiet, till "he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." A few such suitors in these times were worth thousands such as we are. Our prayers stick in our breasts, scarcely come forth; much less do they go up and ascend with that piercing force that would open up the way for deliverances to come down.

But in this there must be some difference between temporal and spiritual things. That prayer which is in the right strain, cannot be too fervent in any thing; but the desire of the thing in temporals may be too earnest. A feverish, distempered heat diseases the soul; therefore, in these things, a holy indifference concerning the particular may, and should be joined with the fervency of prayer. But in spiritual things, there is no danger in vehemency of desire. "Covet" these, "hunger and thirst" for them, be incessantly ardent in the suit; yet even in these, in some particulars, (as with respect to the degree and measure of grace, and some peculiar furtherances,) they should be presented so with earnestness, as that withal it be with a reference and resignation of it to the wisdom and love of our Father.

II. For the other point, the answer of our prayers, which is implied in this openness of the ear, it is a thing very needful to be considered and attended to. If we think that prayer is indeed a thing that God takes notice of, and hath regard to in his dealings

with his children, it is certainly a point of duty and wisdom in them, to observe how he takes notice of it, and bends his ear to it, and puts his hand to help, and so answers it. This both furnishes matter of praise, and stirs up the heart to render it. Therefore, in the Psalms, the "hearing of prayer" is so often observed and recorded, and made a part of the song of praise. And withal it endears both God and prayer unto the soul, as we have both together, Psa. cxvi. 1, "I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications." The transposition in the original is pathetical, "I love, because the Lord hath heard my voice." I am in love, and particularly this causes it; I have found so much kindness in the Lord, I cannot but love. "He hath heard my voice." And then it wins his esteem and affection to prayer. Seeing I find this virtue in it, we shall never part again; "I will call upon him as long as I live." Seeing prayer draweth help and favours from Heaven, I shall not be to seek for a way, in any want or strait that can befall me.

In this there is need of direction; but too many rules may as much confuse a matter, as too few, and do many times perplex the mind, and multiply doubts; as many laws do multiply pleading. Briefly then,

1. Slothful minds do often neglect the answers of God, even when they are most legible in the grant of the very thing itself that was desired. It may be through a total inadvertence in this kind, through never thinking on things as answers of our requests; or possibly, a continual eager pursuit of more, turns away the mind from considering what it hath upon request obtained; we are still so bent upon what further we would have, that we never think what is

already done for us, which is one of the most ordinary causes of ingratitude.

2. But though it be not in the same thing that we desire that our prayers are answered, yet, when the Lord changes our petitions in his answers, it is always for the better. He regards (according to that known word of St. Augustine, *Si non ad voluntatem, ad utilitatem*) our *well* more than our *will*. We beg deliverance; we are not unanswered, if he give patience and support. Be it under a spiritual trial or temptation, "My grace is sufficient for thee." And where the Lord doth thus, it is certainly better for the time, than the other would be. Observe here, "His ears are open to the righteous," but "his eyes are on them too." They have not so his ear as to induce him blindly to give them what they ask, whether it be fit or not; but "his eye is on them," to see and consider their state, and to know better than themselves what is best, and accordingly to answer. This is no prejudice, but a great privilege, and the happiness of his children, that they have a Father who knows what is fit for them, and "withholds no good" from them. And this commutation and exchange of our requests a Christian observing, may usually find out the particular answer of his prayers; and if sometimes he doth not, then his best way is not to subtilize and amuse himself much in that, but rather to keep on in the exercise, knowing (as the apostle speaks in another case) this for certain, "that their labour shall not be in vain in the Lord," 1 Cor. xv. 58, and as the prophet hath it, "I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain," Isa. xlv. 19.

3. Only this we should always remember, not to set bounds and limits to the Lord in point of time,

not to set him a day, that thou wilt attend so long, and no longer. How patiently will some men bestow long attendance on others, where they expect some very poor good or courtesy at their hands! Yet we are very brisk and hasty with Him who never delays us but for our good, to ripen those mercies for us which we, as foolish children, would pluck while they are green, and have neither that sweetness and goodness in them which they shall have in his time. All his works are done in their season. Were there nothing to check our impatiences, but his greatness, and the greatness of those things we ask for, and our own unworthiness, these considerations might curb them, and persuade us how reasonable it is that we should wait. He is a King well worth waiting on; and there is in the very waiting on him, an honour and a happiness far above us. And the things we seek are great; forgiveness of sins, evidence of sonship and heirship, heirship of a kingdom, and we condemned rebels, born heirs of the bottomless pit! And shall such as we be in such haste with such a Lord in such great requests? But further, the attendance which this reason enforces, is sweetened by the consideration of his wisdom and love, that he hath foreseen and chosen the very hour for each mercy fit for us, and will not delay it a moment. Never any yet repented their waiting, but found it fully recompensed with the opportune answer, in such a time as they were then forced to confess was the only best. "I waited patiently," says the psalmist, "in waiting I waited;" but it was all well bestowed, "He inclined to me, and heard my cry, brought me up," &c., Psa. xl. 1. And then he afterwards falls into admiration of the Lord's method, his "wonderful workings and thoughts to us-ward."

"While I was waiting and saw nothing, thy thoughts were towards and for me, and thou didst then work when thy goodness was most remarkable and wonderful."

When thou art in great affliction, outward or inward, thou thinkest, it may be, he regards thee not. Yea, but he doth. Thou art his gold, he knows the time of refining thee, and of then taking thee out of the furnace; he is versed and skilful in that work. Thou sayest, "I have cried long for power against sin, and for some evidence of pardon, and find no answer to either;" yet, leave him not. He never yet cast away any that sought him, and stayed by him, and resolved, whatsoever came of it, to lie at his footstool, and to wait, were it all their lifetime, for a good word or a good look from him. And they choose well who make that their great desire and expectation; for one of his good words or looks will make them up and make them happy for ever; and as he is truth itself, they are sure not to miss of it. "Blessed are all they that wait for him." And thou that sayest, thou canst not find pardon of sin, and power against it; yet consider, whence are those desires of both, which thou once didst not care for. Why dost thou hate that sin which thou didst love, and art troubled and burdened with the guilt of it, under which thou wentest so easily, and which thou didst not feel before? Are not these something of his own work? Yes, surely. And know he will not leave it unfinished, nor "forsake the work of his hands," Psa. cxxxviii. 8. "His eye may be on thee," though thou seest him not, "and his ear open to thy cry," Psa. xxxiv. 15, though for the present he speaks not to thee as thou desirest. It is not said, that his children always see and hear him sensibly; but

yet, when they do not, he is beholding them and hearing them graciously, and will show himself to them, and answer them seasonably.

David says, "I cry in the day-time, and thou hearest not, and in the night season, and am not silent," Psa. xxii. 2; yet will he not entertain hard thoughts of God, nor conclude against him; on the contrary, he acknowledges, "Thou art holy," ver. 3, where, by holiness, is meant his faithfulness (I conceive) to his own; as it follows, "Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel," namely, for the favours he hath showed his people, as ver. 4, "Our fathers trusted in thee."

Let the Lord's open ear persuade us to make much use of it. *Clavis diei, et sera noctis:* "The key of day, and the lock of night." Be much in this sweet and fruitful exercise of prayer, together and apart, under the sense of these three considerations mentioned above; the duty, the dignity, and the utility of prayer.

1. The duty: it is due to the Lord to be worshipped and acknowledged thus, as the fountain of good. How will men crouch and bow one to another upon small requests! and shall he only be neglected by the most, from whom "all" have "life, and breath, and all things?" as the apostle speaks in his sermon, Acts xvii. 25. And then,

2. Consider the dignity of this, to be admitted into so near converse with the highest Majesty. Were there nothing to follow, no answer at all, prayer pays itself in the excellency of its nature, and the sweetness that the soul finds in it. Poor wretched man, to be admitted into heaven while he is on earth, and there to come and speak his mind freely to the Lord of heaven and earth, as his Friend,

as his Father! to empty all his complaints into his bosom; when wearied with the follies and miseries of the world, to refresh his soul in his God. Where there is any thing of his love, this is a privilege of the highest sweetness; for they who love, find much delight in discoursing together, and count all hours short, and think the day runs too fast, that is so spent; and they who are much in this exercise, the Lord doth impart "his secrets" much to them. See Psa. xxv. 14.

3. Consider again, it is the most profitable exercise; no lost time, as profane hearts judge it, but only time gained. All blessings attend this work. It is the richest traffic in the world, for it trades with heaven, and brings home what is most precious there. And as holiness disposes to prayer, so prayer befriends holiness, increases it much. Nothing so refines and purifies the soul, as frequent prayer. If the often conversing with wise men doth so teach and advance the soul in wisdom, how much more then will converse with God! This makes the soul despise the things of the world, and in a manner makes it divine; winds up the soul from the earth, acquainting it with delights that are infinitely sweeter.

The natural heart is full-stuffed with prejudices against the way of holiness, which dissuade and detain it; and therefore the Holy Scriptures most fitly dwell much on this point, asserting the true advantage of it to the soul, and removing those mistakes which it has in respect of that way.

Thus here, and to press it the more home, ver. 10, &c., the apostle, having used the psalmist's words, now follows it forth in his own, and extends what was said concerning the particular way of meekness

and love, &c., in the general doctrine, to all the paths of righteousness.

The main conclusion is, that happiness is the certain consequence and fruit of holiness; all good, even outward good, so far as it holds good, and is not inconsistent with a higher good. If we did believe this more, we should feel it more, and so, upon feeling and experiment, believe it more strongly. All the heavy judgments we feel or fear, are they not the fruit of our own ways, of profaneness, and pride, and malice, and abounding ungodliness? All cry out of hard times, evil days; and yet, who is taking the right way to better them? Yea, who is not still helping to make them worse? Are we not ourselves the greatest enemies of our own peace? Who looks either rightly backward, reflecting on his former ways, or rightly forward, to direct better his way that is before him? Who either says, "What have I done?" as Jer. viii. 6, or, What ought I to do? Acts xvi. 30. And indeed, the one of these depends on the other. *Consilium futurum ex præterito venit* (Seneca): "Future determination springs from the past." "I considered my ways," says David, turned them over and over, (as the word is,) "and then I turned my feet unto thy testimonies," Psa. cxix. 59.

Are there any, for all the judgments fallen on us, or that threaten us, returning apace with regret and hatred of sin, hastening unto God, and mourning and weeping as they go, bedewing each step with their tears? Yea, where is that newness of life that the word has called for so long, and that now the word and the rod together are so loudly calling for? Who is more "refraining his tongue from evil, and his lips from guile?" changing oaths, and

lies, and calumnies, into a new language, into prayers, and reverent speaking of God, and joining a suitable, consonant carriage? Who is "eschewing evil, and doing good," labouring to be fertile in holiness, "to bring forth much fruit to God?" This were the way "to see good days" indeed; this is the way to the longest life, the only long life and length of days, one eternal day: as St. Augustine comments on those words, "One day in thy courts is better than a thousand," Psa. lxxxiv. 10. *Millia dierum desiderant homines, et multum volunt hîc vivere; contemnant millia dierum, desiderent unum, qui non habet ortum et occasum, cui non cepit hesternus, quem non urget crastinus.* "Men desire thousands of days, and wish to live long here: rather let them despise thousands of days, and desire that one which hath neither dawn nor darkening, to which no yesterday gives place, which yields to no to-morrow."

The reason added is above all exception, it is supreme: "The eyes of the Lord," &c. If he who made times and seasons, and commands and forms them as he will, if he can give "good days," or make men happy, then the only sure way to it must be the way of his obedience; to be in the constant favour of the great King, and still in his gracious thoughts; to have his eye and his ear. If this will serve the turn, (and if this do it not, I pray you what will?) then the righteous man is the only happy man, "For the eyes of the Lord are upon him," &c. Surer happy days may be expected hence, than theirs who draw them from the aspect of the stars; the eyes of the Father of lights benignly beholding them, the trine aspect of the blessed Trinity. The love he carries to them, draws

his eye still towards them; there is no forgetting of them, nor slipping of the fit season to do them good: his mind, I may say, runs on that. He sees how it is with them, and receives their suits gladly, rejoicing to put favours upon them. He is their assured Friend, yea, he is their Father: what then can they want? Surely they cannot miss of any good that his love and power can help them to.

"But his face is against them that do evil." So our happiness and misery are in "his face," his looks. Nothing so comfortable as his favourable face, nothing so terrible, again, as his face—"his anger," as the Hebrew word is often taken, that signifies "his face." And yet, how many sleep sound under this misery! But believe it, it is a dead and a deadly sleep; the Lord standing in terms of enmity with thee, and yet thy soul *at ease!* Pitiful, accursed ease! I regard not the differences of your outward estate; that is not a thing worth the speaking of. If thou be poor and base, and in the world's eye but a wretch, and withal under the hatred of God, as being an impenitent, hardened sinner, those other things are nothing; this is the top, yea, the total sum of thy misery. Or if thou be beautiful, or rich, or noble, or witty, or all these together, or what thou wilt, yet, is "the face of the Lord against thee?" Think as thou wilt, thy estate (*splendida miseria*) is not to be envied, but lamented: I cannot say, Much good do it thee, with all thy enjoyments, for it is certain they can do thee no good; and if thou dost not believe this now, the day is at hand wherein thou shalt be forced to believe it, finding it then irrevocably true. If you will, you may still follow "the things of the world, walk after the lusts of your own hearts," neglect God, and please yourselves,

but, as Solomon's word is of judgment, Remember that the face of the Lord is against thee, Eccl. ix. 9; and in that judgment he shall unveil it, and let thee see it against thee. Oh, the most terrible of all sights!

The godly often do not see the Lord's favourable looks, while he is eyeing them; and the wicked usually do not seen or perceive, neither will believe, that "his face is against them;" but, besides that the day of full discovery is coming, the Lord doth sometimes let both the one and the other know somewhat how he stands affected towards them. In peculiar deliverances and mercies he tells his own, that he forgets them not, but both sees and hears them when they think he does neither, after that loving and gracious manner which they desire, and which is here meant; and sometimes he lets forth glances of his bright countenance, darts in a beam upon their souls that is more worth than many worlds. And on the other side, he is pleased sometimes to make it known that his face is against the wicked, either by remarkable outward judgments, which to them are the vent of his just enmity against them, or to some he speaks it more home in horrors and affrights of conscience, which to them are earnests and pledges of their full misery, that "inheritance of woe" reserved, as the joys and comforts of believers are, of their "inheritance of glory."

Therefore, if you have any belief of these things, be persuaded, be entreated to forsake the way of ungodliness. Do not flatter yourselves, and dream of escaping, when you hear of outward judgments on your neighbours and brethren, but tremble and be humbled. Remember our Saviour's words, Think ye that those on whom the tower of Siloam

fell, were greater sinners than others? I tell you, Nay; but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish, Luke xiii. 4, 5. This seemingly harsh word, he who was wisdom and sweetness itself uttered, and even in it spoke like a Saviour: he speaks of perishing, that they might not perish, and presses repentance by the heavy doom of impenitence.

When you hear of this, there is none of you would willingly choose it, that the Lord's face should be against you, although upon very high offers made to you of other things. You think, I know, that the very sound of it is somewhat fearful, and on the other side, have possibly some confused notion of his favour, as a thing desirable; and yet do not bestir yourselves, to avoid the one, and inquire after the other; which is certainly by reason of your unbelief. For if you think of the love of God, as his word speaks of it, and as you will say you do, whence is it, I pray you, that there is no trifle in this world that will not take more deeply with you, and which you follow not with more earnestness, than this great business of reconciliation with God, in order to your finding his face not only not against you, but graciously towards you? "His eyes upon you, and his ears open to your prayer."

Your blessedness is not,—no, believe it, it is not where most of you seek it, in things below you. How can that be? It must be a higher good to make you happy. While you labour and sweat for it in any thing under the sun, your pains run all to waste; you seek a happy life in the region of death. Here, here it is alone, in the love and favour of God, in having his countenance and friendship, and free access and converse; and this is no where to be found, but in the ways of holiness.

Ver. 13. And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?

This the apostle adds, as a further reason of the safety and happiness of that way he points out, a reason drawn from its own nature. There is something even intrinsical in a meek, and upright, and holy carriage, that is apt, in part, to free a man from many evils and mischiefs which the ungodly are exposed to, and do readily draw upon themselves. Your spotless and harmless deportment will much bind up the hands even of your enemies, and sometimes, possibly, somewhat allay and cool the malice of their hearts, that they cannot so rage against you as otherwise they might. It will be somewhat strange and monstrous to rage against the innocent. "Who is he that will harm you?" Here are two things: I. The carriage. II. The advantage of it.

I. Their carriage is expressed: "followers of that which is good." The Greek word is, "imitators."

There is an imitation of men that is impious and wicked, which consists in taking the copy of their sins. Again, there is an imitation which, though not so grossly evil, yet is poor and servile, being in mean things, yea, sometimes descending to imitate the very imperfections of others, as fancying some comeliness in them; as some of Basil's scholars, who imitated his slow speaking, which he had a little in the extreme, and could not help. But this is always laudable, and worthy of the best minds, to be "imitators of that which is good," whereso-ever they find it; for that stays not in any man's person, as the ultimate pattern, but rises to the highest grace, being man's nearest likeness to God,

his image and resemblance, and so, following the example of the saints in holiness, we look higher than them, and consider them as receivers, but God as the first Owner and Dispenser of grace, bearing his stamp and superscription, and belonging peculiarly to him, in what hand soever it is found, as carrying the mark of no other owner than him.

The word of God contains our copy in its perfection, and very legible and clear; and so, the imitation of good, in the complete rule of it, is the regulating of our ways by the word. But even there we find, besides general rules, the particular tracks of life of divers eminent holy persons, and those on purpose set before us, that we may know holiness not to be an idle, imaginary thing, but that men have really been holy, though not altogether sinless, yet, holy and spiritual in some good measure; have shined as lights amidst a perverse generation, as greater stars in a dark night, and were yet men, as St. James says of Elias, like us in nature (ὁμοιοπαθεις) and in the frailty of it; "subject to like passions as we are," James v. 17. Why may we not then aspire to be holy as they were, and attain to it?—although we should fall short of the degree, yet not stopping at a small measure, but running further, "pressing still forward toward the mark;" following them in the way they went, though at a distance; not reaching them, and yet walking, yea, running after them as fast as we can; not judging of holiness by our own sloth and natural averseness, taking it for a singularity fit only for rare, extraordinary persons, such as prophets and apostles were, or as the church of Rome fancies those to be, to whom it vouchsafes a room in the roll of saints. Do you not know that holiness is the only *via regia*, this

following of good the path wherein all the children of God must walk, one following after another, each striving to equal, and, if they could, to outstrip even those they look on as most advanced in it? This is, amongst many others, a misconceit in the Romish church, that they seem to make holiness a kind of impropriate good, which the common sort can have little share in, almost all piety being shut up within cloister walls, as its only fit dwelling; but it hath not liked their lodging, it seems; it has flown over the walls away from them, for there is little of it even there to be found. Their opinion, however, places it there, as having little to do abroad in the world; whereas, the truth is, that all Christians have this for their common task, though some are under more peculiar obligations to study this one copy. Look on the rule of holiness, and be followers of it, and followers or imitators one of another, so far as their carriage agrees with that primitive copy, as written after it. "Be ye followers of me," μιμηται, says the apostle, even to the meanest Christians amongst those he wrote to, but thus, "as I am of Christ," 1 Cor. xi. 1.

Is it thus with us? Are we zealous and emulous followers of that which is good, exciting each other by our example to a holy and Christian conversation, "provoking one another," so the apostle's word is, "to love and to good works?" Heb. x. 24. Or, are not the most mutual corrupters of each other, and of the places and societies where they live; some leading, and others following in their ungodliness; not regarding the course of those who are most desirous to walk holily, or, if at all, doing it with a corrupt and evil eye, not in order to study and follow what is good in them, their way of holi-

ness, but to espy any the least wrong step, to take exact notice of any imperfection or malignant slander, and by this, either to reproach religion, or to hearten or harden themselves in their irreligion and ungodliness, seeking warrant for their own willing licentiousness in the unwilling failings of God's children? And, in their converse with such as themselves, they are following their profane way, and flattering and blessing one another in it. "What need we be so precise?" And, "If I should not do as others, they would laugh at me, I should pass for a fool." Well, thou wilt be a fool of the most wretched kind, rather than be accounted one by such as are fools, and know not at all wherein true wisdom consists.

Thus the most are carried with the stream of this wicked world, their own inward corruption easily agreeing and suiting with it; every man, as a drop, falling into a torrent, and easily made one, and running along with it into that dead sea where it empties itself.

But those whom the Lord hath a purpose to sever and save, he carries in a course contrary even to that violent stream. And these are the students of holiness, "the followers of good," who bend their endeavours thus, and look on all sides diligently, on what may animate and advance them; on the example of the saints in former times, and on the good they espy in those who live together with them; and above all, studying that perfect rule in the Scriptures, and that highest and first pattern there so often set before them, even the author of that rule, the Lord himself, "to be holy as he is holy, to be bountiful and merciful as their heavenly Father," and in all labouring to be, as the apostle exhorts, "followers

of God as dear children," Eph. v. 1, 2. [Τέλος ἀνθρώπου ὁμοίωσις Θέῳ, says Pythagoras.] Children who are beloved of their father, and do love and reverence him, will be ambitious to be like him, and particularly aim at the following of any virtues or excellency in him. Now, thus it is most reasonable that it should be in the children of God, their Father being the highest and best of all excellency and perfection.

But this excellent pattern is drawn down nearer their view, in the Son Jesus Christ; where we have that highest example made low, and yet losing nothing of its perfection, so that we may study God in man, and read all our lesson, without any blot, even in our own nature. And this is truly the only way to be the best proficients in this following and imitating of all good. In him we may learn all, even those lessons which men most despise, God teaching them by acting them, and calling us to follow: "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart," Matt. xi. 29. But this is too large a subject. Would you advance in all grace? Study Christ much, and you shall find not only the pattern in him, but strength and skill from him, to follow it.

II. The advantage; "Who is he that will harm you?"

The very name of it says so much; it is "a good," worthy the following for itself. But there is this further to enforce it, that, besides higher benefit, it oftentimes cuts off the occasions of present evils and disturbances, which otherwise are incident to men. "Who is he that will harm you?" Men, evil men, will often be overcome by our blameless and harmless behaviour.

1. In the life of a godly man, taken together in

the whole body and frame of it, there is a grave beauty or comeliness, which oftentimes forces some kind of reverence and respect to it, even in ungodly minds.

2. Though a natural man cannot love them spiritually, as graces of the Spirit of God, for so only the partakers of them are lovers of them, yet he may have, and usually hath a natural liking and esteem of some kind of virtues which are in a Christian, and are not, in their right nature, to be found in any other, though a moralist may have somewhat like them; meekness, and patience, and charity, and fidelity, &c.

3. These, and other such like graces, do make a Christian life so inoffensive and calm, that, except where the matter of their God or religion is made the crime, malice itself can scarcely tell where to fasten its teeth, or lay hold; it hath nothing to pull by, though it would; yea, oftentimes, for want of work or occasions, it will fall asleep for awhile. Whereas ungodliness and iniquity, sometimes by breaking out into notorious crimes, draws out the sword of civil justice, and where it rises not so high, yet it involves men in frequent contentions and quarrels, Prov. xxiii. 29. How often are the lusts, and pride, and covetousness of men, paid with dangers and troubles, and vexations, which, besides what is abiding them hereafter, do even in this present life spring out of them! These, the godly pass free of by their just, and mild, and humble carriage. "Whence so many jars and strifes" among the greatest part, but from their unchristian hearts and lives, "from their lusts that war in their members," as St. James says, their self-love and unmortified passions? One will abate nothing of his will, nor

the other of his. Thus, where pride and passion meet on both sides, it cannot be but a fire will be kindled; when hard flints and steel strike together, the sparks will fly about: but a soft, mild spirit is a great preserver of its own peace, kills the power of contest; as woolpacks, or such like soft matter, most deaden the force of bullets. "A soft answer turns away wrath," says Solomon, Prov. xv. 1; beats it off, "breaks the bone," as he says, the very strength of it, as the bones are of the body.

And thus we find it, those who think themselves high spirited, and will bear least, as they speak, are often, even by that, forced to bow most, or to burst under it, while humility and meekness escape many a burden, and many a blow, always keeping peace within, and often without too.

Reflection 1. If this were duly considered, might it not do somewhat to induce your minds to love the way of religion, for that it would so much abate the turbulence and unquietness that abound in the lives of men, a great part whereof the most do procure by the earthliness and distemper of their own carnal minds, and the disorder in their ways that arises thence?

Reflection 2. You whose hearts are set towards God, and your feet entered into his ways, I hope will find no reason for a change, but many reasons to commend and endear those ways to you every day more than the last, and, amongst the rest, even this, that in them you escape many even present mischiefs which you see the ways of the world are full of. And, if you will be careful to ply your rule and study your copy better, you shall find it more so. The more you "follow that which is good," the more shall you avoid a number of outward evils,

which are ordinarily drawn upon men by their own enormities and passions. Keep as close as you can to the genuine, even track of a Christian walk, and labour for a prudent and meek behaviour, adorning your holy profession, and this shall adorn you, and sometimes gain "those that are without," yea, even your enemies shall be constrained to approve it.

It is well known how much the spotless lives and patient sufferings of the primitive Christians did sometimes work upon their beholders, yea, on their persecutors, and persuaded some who would not share with them in their religion, yet to speak and write on their behalf. Seeing, then, that reason and experience do jointly aver it, that the lives of men conversant together have generally a great influence one upon another, for example is an animated or living rule, and is both the shortest and most powerful way of teaching—

(1.) Whosoever of you are in an exemplary or leading place in relation to others, be it many or few, be ye, first, "followers of God." Set before you the rule of holiness, and withal, the best and highest examples of those who have walked according to it, and then you will be leading in it those who are under you, and they being bent to follow you, in so doing will "follow that which is good." Lead and draw them on, by admonishing, and counselling, and exhorting; but especially, by walking. Pastors, be [τύποι] ensamples to the flock, or "models," as our apostle hath it, 1 Pet. v. 3, that they may be stamped aright, taking the impression of your lives. Sound doctrine alone will not serve. Though the water you give your flocks be pure, yet, if you lay spotted rods before them, it will bring forth spotted lives in them. Either teach not at all,

or teach by the rhetoric of your lives.* Elders, be such in grave and pious carriage, whatsoever be your years; for young men may be so, and, possibly, grey hairs may have nothing under them but gaddishness and folly many years old, habituated and inveterate ungodliness. Parents and masters, let your children and servants read in your lives the life and power of godliness, the practice of piety not lying in your windows or corners of your houses, and confined within the clasp of the book bearing that or any such like title, but shining in your lives.

(2.) You that are easily receptive of the impression of example, beware of the stamp of unholiness, and of a carnal, formal course of profession, whereof the examples are most abounding; but, though they be fewer who bear the lively image of God impressed on their hearts and expressed in their actions, yet study these, and be followers of them, as they are of Christ. I know you will espy much irregular and unsanctified carriage in us who are set up for the ministry, and if you look round, you will find the world lying in wickedness; yet if there be any who have any sparks of Divine light in them, converse with those, and follow them.

(3.) And, generally, this I say to all, (for none are so complete but they may espy some imitable and emulable good, even in meaner Christians,) acquaint yourselves with the word, the rule of holiness; and then, with an eye to that, look on one another, and be zealous of progress in the ways of holiness. Choose to converse with such as may excite you and advance you, both by their advice and example. Let not a corrupt generation in which you live, be the worse by you, nor you the worse by it. As far

* Η μὴ διδάσκειν, ἢ διδάσκειν τῷ τρόπῳ.

as you necessarily engage in some conversation with those who are unholy, let them not pull you into the mire, but, if you can, help them out. And let not any custom of sin prevailing about you, by being familiarly seen, gain upon you, so as to think it fashionable and comely, yea, or so as not to think it deformed and hateful. Know, that you must row against the stream of wickedness in the world, unless you would be carried with it to the dead sea, or lake of perdition. Take that grave counsel given Rom. xii. 2, "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind;" that is, the daily advancement in renovation, purifying and refining every day.

Now, in this way you shall have sweet inward peace and joy, as well as some outward advantage, in that men, except they are monstrously cruel and malicious, will not so readily "harm you;" it will abate much of their rage. But, however, if you do not escape suffering by your holy carriage, yea, "if you suffer" even for it, yet in that "are ye happy," as the apostle immediately adds:—

Ver. 14. But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled.

In this verse are two things: First, even in the most blameless way of a Christian his suffering is supposed. Second, his happiness, even in suffering, is asserted.

I. Suffering is supposed, notwithstanding righteousness, yea, for righteousness; and that, not as a rare unusual accident, but as the frequent lot of Christians; as Luther calls persecution, *malus genius evangelii*, "The evil genius of the gospel." And

we, being forewarned of this, as not only the possible, but the frequent lot of the saints, ought not to hearken to the false prophecies of our own self-love, which divines what it would gladly have, and easily persuades us to believe it. Think not that any prudence will lead you by all oppositions and malice of an ungodly world. Many winter blasts will meet you in the most inoffensive way of religion, if you keep straight to it. Suffering and war with the world, is a part of the godly man's portion here, which seems hard, but take it altogether, it is sweet: none in their wits will refuse that legacy entire, In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in me ye shall have peace, John xvi. 33.

Look about you, and see if there be any state of man, or course of life, exempted from troubles. The greatest are usually subject to greatest vexations; as the largest bodies have the largest shadows attending them. We need not tell nobles and rich men, that contentment doth not dwell in great palaces and titles, nor in full coffers; they feel it, that they are not free of much anguish and molestation, and that a proportionable train of cares, as constantly as of servants, follows great place and wealth. Riches and trouble, or noise, are signified by the same Hebrew word. Compare Job xxxvi. 19 with xxx. 24. And kings find that their crowns, which are set so richly with diamonds without, are lined with thorns within. And if we speak of men who are "servants to unrighteousness," besides what is to come, are they not often forced to suffer, amongst the service of their lusts, the distempers that attend unhealthy intemperance, the poverty that dogs luxury at the heels, and the fit punishment of voluptuous persons in painful diseases, which either quickly cut the

thread of life, or make their aged bones full of the sins of their youth? Job xx. 11. Take what way you will, there is no place or condition so fenced and guarded, but public calamities, or personal griefs, find a way to reach us.

Seeing, then, we must suffer, whatever course we take, this kind of suffering, "to suffer for righteousness," is far the best. What Julius Cæsar said ill of doing ill, *Si violandum est jus, regnandi causa violandum*, we may well say of suffering ill; "If it must be, it is best to be for a kingdom." And these are the terms on which Christians are called to suffer for righteousness: "If we will reign with Christ," certain it is, "we must suffer with him;" and, "if we do suffer with him," it is as certain, "we shall reign with him," 2 Tim. ii. 12. And therefore such sufferers are "happy."

But I shall prosecute this suffering for righteousness, only with relation to the apostle's present reasoning. His conclusion he establishes, 1. From the favour and protection of God; 2. From the nature of the thing itself. Now we would consider the consistence of this supposition with those reasons.

1. From the favour or protection of God. "The eyes of the Lord" being "on the righteous" for their good, and "his ear open to their prayer," how is it that, notwithstanding all this favour and inspection, they are so much exposed to suffering, and even for the regard and affection they bear towards him, "suffering for righteousness?" These seem not to agree well; yet they do.

It is not said that his eye is so on them, as that he will never see them afflicted, nor have them suffer any thing; no, but this is their great privilege and comfort in suffering, that his gracious eye is then

upon them, and sees their trouble, and his ear towards them, not so as to grant them an exemption, for that they will not seek for, but seasonable deliverance, and, in the mean while, strong support, as is evident in that xxxivth Psalm. If his eye be always on them, he sees them suffer often, for "their afflictions are many," ver. 19; and if his ear be to them, he hears many sighs and cries pressed out by sufferings. And they are content; this is enough, yea, better than not to suffer; they suffer, and often directly for him, but he sees it all, takes perfect notice of it, therefore it is not lost. And they are forced to cry, but none of their cries escape his ear. He hears, and he manifests that he sees and hears, for "He delivers them;" and, till he does, he keeps them from being crushed under the weight of the suffering: "He keeps all his bones, not one of them is broken," ver. 20. He sees, yea, appoints and provides these conflicts for his choicest servants. He sets his champions to encounter the malice of Satan and the world, for his sake, to give proof of the truth and the strength of their love to him for whom they suffer, and to overcome even in suffering.

He is sure of his designed advantages out of the sufferings of his church and of his saints for his name. He loses nothing, and they lose nothing; but their enemies, when they rage most, and prevail most, are ever the greatest losers. His own glory grows, the graces of his people grow, yea, their very number grows, and that sometimes most by their greatest sufferings. This was evident in the first ages of the Christian church. Where were the glory of so much invincible love and patience, if they had not been so put to it?

2. For the other argument, that the said "follow-

ing of good" would preserve from "harm," it speaks truly the nature of the thing, what it is apt to do, and what, in some measure, it often doth; but considering the nature of the world, its enmity against God and religion, that strong poison in the serpent's seed, it is not strange that it often proves otherwise; that, notwithstanding the righteous carriage of Christians, yea, even "because" of it, they suffer much. It is a resolved case, "All that will live godly shall suffer persecution," 2 Tim. iii. 12. It meets a Christian in his entrance to the way of the kingdom, and goes along all the way. No sooner canst thou begin to seek the way to heaven, but the world will seek how to vex and molest thee, and make that way grievous; if no other way, by scoffs and taunts, intended as bitter blasts to destroy the tender blossom or bud of religion, or, as Herod, to kill Christ newly born. You shall no sooner begin to inquire after God, but, twenty to one, they will begin to inquire whether thou art gone mad. But if thou knowest "who it is whom thou hast trusted," and whom thou lovest, this is a small matter. What though it were deeper and sharper sufferings! yet still, "if you suffer for righteousness, happy are ye."

II. Which is the next thing that was proposed, and more particularly imports, 1. That a Christian under the heaviest load of sufferings for righteousness, is yet still "happy," notwithstanding those sufferings. 2. That he is happier even by those sufferings. And,

1. All the sufferings and distresses of this world are not able to destroy the happiness of a Christian, nor to diminish it; yea, they cannot at all touch it; it is out of their reach. If it were built on worldly enjoyments, then, worldly privations and sufferings

might shake it, yea, might undo it: when those rotten props fail, that which rests on them must fall. He that hath set his heart on his riches, a few hours can make him miserable. He that lives on popular applause, it is almost in any body's power to rob him of his happiness; a little slight or disgrace undoes him. Or, whatsoever the soul fixes on of these moving, unfixed things, pluck them from it, and it must cry after them, "Ye have taken away my gods." But the believer's happiness is safe, out of the reach of shot. He may be impoverished, and imprisoned, and tortured, and killed, but this one thing is out of hazard; he cannot be miserable; still, in the midst of all these, he subsists a happy man. If all friends be shut out, yet the visits of the Comforter may be frequent, bringing him glad tidings from heaven, and communing with him of the love of Christ, and solacing him in that. It was a great word for a heathen to say of his false accusers, "Kill me they may, but they cannot hurt me." How much more confidently may the Christian say so! Banishment he fears not, for his country is above; nor death, for it sends him home into that country.

The believing soul having hold of Jesus Christ, can easily despise the best and the worst of the world, and defy all that is in it; can share with the apostle in that defiance which he gives, "I am persuaded that neither death nor life shall separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord," Rom. viii. 38, 39. Yea, what though the frame of the world were dissolving, and falling to pieces! This happiness holds, and is not stirred by it; for it is built upon that rock of eternity, that stirs not, nor changes at all.

Our main work, truly, if you will believe it, is this; to provide this immovable happiness, which amidst all changes, and losses, and sufferings, may hold firm. You "may be free, choose it rather"—not to stand to the courtesy of any thing about you, nor of any man, whether enemy or friend, for the tenure of your happiness. Lay it higher and surer, and if you be wise, provide such a peace as will remain untouched in the hottest flame, such a light as will shine in the deepest dungeon, and such a life as is safe even in death itself, that life which is "hid with Christ in God," Col. iii. 3.

But if in other sufferings, even the worst and saddest, the believer is still a happy man, then, more especially in those that are the best kind, sufferings for righteousness. Not only do they not detract from his happiness, but,

2. They concur and give accession to it; he is happy even so by suffering: as will appear from the following considerations.

(1.) It is the happiness of a Christian, until he attain perfection, to be advancing towards it: to be daily refining from sin, and growing richer and stronger in the graces that make up a Christian, a new creature; to attain a higher degree of patience, and meekness, and humility; to have the heart more weaned from the earth, and fixed on heaven. Now, as other afflictions of the saints do help them in these, their sufferings for righteousness, the unrighteous and injurious dealings of the world with them have a particular fitness for this purpose. Those trials that come immediately from God's own hand, seem to bind to a patient and humble compliance, with more authority, and, I may say, necessity; there is no plea, no place for so much as a word,

unless it be directly and expressly against the Lord's own dealing; but unjust suffering at the hands of men, requires that respect unto God, without whose hand they cannot move, that for his sake, and for reverence and love to him, a Christian can go through those with that mild evenness of spirit which overcomes even in suffering.

And there is nothing outward more fit to persuade a man to give up with the world and its friendship, than to feel much of its enmity and malice, and that directly venting itself against religion, making that the very quarrel, which is of all things dearest to a Christian, and in the highest esteem with him.

If the world should caress them, and smile on them, they might be ready to forget their home, or at least to abate in the frequent thoughts and fervent desires of it, and to turn into some familiarity with the world, and favourable thoughts of it, so as to let out somewhat of their hearts after it; and thus grace would grow faint by the diversion and calling forth of the spirits: as in summer, in the hottest and fairest weather, it is with the body.

It is an observation confirmed by the experience of all ages, that when the church flourished most in outward peace and wealth, it abated most of its spiritual lustre, which is its genuine and true beauty, *opibus major, virtutibus minor;* and when it seemed most miserable by persecutions and sufferings, it was most happy in sincerity, and zeal, and vigour of grace. When the moon shines brightest towards the earth, it is dark heavenwards: and, on the contrary, when it appears not, it is nearest the sun, and clear towards heaven.

(2.) Persecuted Christians are happy in acting and evidencing, by those sufferings for God, their love

to him. Love delights in difficulties, and grows in them. The more a Christian suffers for Christ, the more he loves him, and accounts him the dearer; and the more he loves him, still the more can he suffer for him.

(3.) They are happy, as in testifying love to Christ and glorifying him, so in their conformity with him, which is love's ambition. Love affects likeness and harmony at any rate. A believer would readily take it as an affront, that the world should be kind to him, that was so harsh and cruel to his beloved Lord and Master. Canst thou expect, or wouldst thou wish smooth language from that world which reviled thy Jesus, which called him Beelzebub? Couldst thou own and accept friendship at its hands, which buffeted him, and shed his blood? Or, art thou not rather most willing to share with him, and of St. Paul's mind, an ambassador in chains; [Πρεσβευω ἐν ἁλυσει] God forbid that I should glory in any thing save in the cross of Christ, whereby the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world, Gal. vi. 14.

(4.) Suffering Christians are happy in the rich supplies of spiritual comfort and joy, which in those times of suffering are usual; so that as their sufferings for Christ do abound, their consolations in him abound much more, as the apostle testifies, 2 Cor. i. 5. God is speaking most peace to the soul, when the world speaks most war and enmity against it; and this compensates abundantly. When the Christian lays the greatest sufferings men can inflict in the one balance, and the least glances of God's countenance in the other, he says, It is worth all the enduring of those to enjoy this: he says with David, "Let them curse, but bless Thou," Psa. cix. 28; let

them frown, but smile Thou. And thus God usually doth; he refreshes such as are prisoners for him, with visits which they would gladly buy again with the hardest restraints and debarring of nearest friends. The world cannot but misjudge the state of suffering Christians; it sees, as St. Bernard speaks, their crosses, but not their anointings: *vident cruces nostras, unctiones non vident.* Was not Stephen, think you, in a happy posture even in his enemies' hands? Was he afraid of the showers of stones coming about his ears, who saw the heavens opened, and Jesus standing on the Father's right hand? so little troubled with their stoning of him, that, as the text hath it, in the midst of them "he fell asleep?" Acts vii. 60.

(5.) If those sufferings be so small, that they are weighed down even by present comforts, and so the Christian be happy in them in that regard, how much more doth the "weight of glory" that follows surpass these sufferings! They "are not worthy to come in comparison," they are as nothing to that glory that shall be revealed, in the apostle's arithmetic, Rom. viii. 18, [λογίζομαι,] when I have cast up the sum of the sufferings of this present time, this instant "now," [τὸ νῦν,] they amount to just nothing in respect of that glory. Now, these sufferings are happy, because they are the way to this happiness, and pledges of it, and, if any thing can do, they raise the very degree of it. However, it is an "exceeding excellent weight of glory." The Hebrew word which signifies "glory" signifies "weight." Earthly glories are all "too light," τὸ ἐλαφρὸν, except in the weight of the cares and sorrows that attend them; but that hath the weight of complete blessedness. Speak not of all the sufferings,

nor of all the prosperities of this poor life, nor of any thing in it, as worthy of a thought, when "that glory" is named; yea, let not this life be called "life," when we mention that other life, which our Lord, by his death, hath purchased for us.

"Be not afraid of their terror." No time, nor place in the world, is so favourable to religion, that it is not still needful to arm a Christian mind against the outward oppositions and discouragements he shall meet with in his way to heaven. This is the apostle's scope here; and he doth it, 1. By an assertion, 2. By an exhortation: the assertion, that, in "suffering for righteousness," they "are happy;" the exhortation, agreeably to the assertion, that "they fear not." Why should they fear any thing, who are assured of happiness, yea, who are the more happy by reason of those very things that seem most to be feared?

The words are in part borrowed from the prophet Isaiah, who relates them as the Lord's words to him and other godly persons with him in that time, countermanding in them that carnal distrustful fear, which drove a profane king and people to seek help rather any where than in God, who was their strength: "Fear not their fear, nor be afraid; but sanctify the Lord of hosts himself, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread," Isa. viii. 12, 13. This the apostle extends as a universal rule for Christians in the midst of their greatest troubles and dangers.

The things opposed here, are, a perplexing, troubling "fear of sufferings," as the soul's distemper, and a "sanctifying of God in the heart," as the

sovereign cure of it, and the true principle of a healthful, sound constitution of mind.

Natural fear, though not evil in itself, yet, in the natural man, is constantly irregular and disordered in the actings of it, still missing its due object, or measure, or both; either running in a wrong channel, or overrunning the banks. As there are no pure elements to be found here in this lower part of the world, but only in the philosophers' books, (who define them as pure, but they find them so no where,) thus we may speak of our natural passions, as not sinful in their nature, yet in us who are naturally sinful, yea, full of sin, they cannot escape the mixture and alloy of it.

Sin hath put the soul into universal disorder, so that it neither loves nor hates what it ought, nor as it ought; hath neither right joy, nor sorrow, nor hope, nor fear. A very small matter stirs and troubles it; and as waters that are stirred, (so the word ταραχθῆτε signifies,) having dregs in the bottom, become muddy and impure, thus the soul, by carnal fear, is confused, and there is neither quiet nor clearness in it. A "troubled sea," as it "cannot rest," so, in its restlessness, it "casts up mire," as the prophet speaks, Isa. lvii. 20. Thus it is with the unrenewed heart of man: the least blasts that arise disturb it, and make it restless, and its own impurity makes it cast up mire. Yea, it is never right with the natural man: either he is asleep in carnal confidence, or, being shaken out of that, he is hurried and tumbled to and fro with carnal fears: he is either in a lethargy, or in a fever, or trembling ague. When troubles are at a distance, he is ready to fold his hands, and take his ease as long as it may

be; and then, being surprised when they come rushing on him, his sluggish ease is paid with a surcharge of perplexing and affrighting fears. And is not this the condition of the most?

Now, because these evils are not fully cured in the believer, but he is subject to carnal security, (as David, "I said in my prosperity, I shall never be moved," Psa. xxx. 6,) and he is filled with undue fears and doubts in the apprehensions or feeling of trouble, (as the psalmist likewise complaining, confesses the dejection and disquietness of his soul, and again, that he had almost lost his standing, "My feet had well nigh slipped," Psa. lxxiii. 2,) therefore, it is very needful to caution them often with such words as these, "Fear not their fear, neither be ye troubled." You may take it objectively, "their fear!" Be not afraid of the world's malice, or any thing it can effect. Or it may be taken subjectively, as the prophet means: Do not you fear after the manner of the world; be not distrustfully troubled with any affliction that can befall you. Surely it is pertinent in either sense, or in both together; "fear not what they can do, nor fear as they do."

If we look on the condition of men, ourselves and others, are not the minds of the greatest part continually tossed, and their lives worn out betwixt vain hopes and fears,* providing incessantly new matter of disquiet to themselves?

Contemplative men have always taken notice of this grand malady in our nature, and have attempted in many ways the cure of it, have bestowed much pains in seeking out prescriptions and rules for the attainment of a settled tranquillity of spirit free from the fears and troubles that perplex us; but they have

* Hæc inter dubii vivimus et morimur.

proved but mountebanks, who give big words enough, and do little or nothing, "all physicians of no value," or of nothing, good for nothing, as Job speaks, Job xiii. 4. Some things they have said well concerning the outward causes of this inward evil, and of the inefficacy of inferior outward things to help it; but they have not descended to the bottom and inward cause of this our wretched, unquiet condition; much less have they ascended to the true and only remedy of it. In this Divine light is needful, and here we have it in the following verse.

Ver. 15. But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.

Implying the cause of all our fears and troubles to be this, our ignorance and disregard of God; and the due knowledge and acknowledgment of him, to be the only establishment and strength of the mind.

In the words we may consider these three things: 1. This respect of God, as it is here expressed, "Sanctify the Lord God." 2. The seat of it, "in your hearts." 3. The fruit of it, the power that this sanctifying of God in the heart hath, to rid that heart of those fears and troubles to which it is here opposed as their proper remedy.

"Sanctify the Lord God." He is holy, most holy, the fountain of holiness. It is he, he alone, who powerfully sanctifies us, and then, and not till then, we sanctify him. When he hath made us holy, we know and confess him to be holy, we worship and serve our holy God, we glorify him

with our whole souls and all our affections. We sanctify him by acknowledging his greatness, and power, and goodness, and (which is here more particularly intended) we do this by a holy fear of him, and faith in him. These within us confess his greatness, and power, and goodness: as the prophet is express, "Sanctify him, and let him be your fear and your dread," Isa. viii. 13; and then he adds, If thus you sanctify him, you shall further sanctify him. "He shall be your sanctuary:" you shall account him so, in believing in him, and shall find him so, in his protecting you; you shall repose on him for safety. And these particularly cure the heart of undue fears.

"In your hearts." We are to be sanctified in our words and actions, but primarily in our hearts, as the root and principle of the rest. He "sanctifies" his own "throughout," makes their language and their lives holy, but first, and most of all, their hearts. And, as he chiefly sanctifies the heart, it chiefly sanctifies him; acknowledges and worships him often when the tongue and body do not, and possibly cannot well join with it: it fears, and loves, and trusts in him, which properly the outward man cannot do, though it does follow and is acted on by these affections, and so shares in them according to its capacity.

Beware of an external, superficial sanctifying of God, for he accepts it not; he will interpret that a profaning of him and his name. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked," Gal. vi. 7. He looks through all visages and appearances, in upon the heart; sees how it entertains him, and stands affected to him; whether it be possessed with reverence and love, more than either thy tongue or carriage can

express. And if it be not so, all thy seeming worship is but injury, and thy speaking of him is but babbling, be thy discourse ever so excellent; yea, the more thou hast seemed to sanctify God, while thy heart hath not been chief in the business, thou shalt not, by such service, have the less, but the more fear and trouble in the day of trouble, when it comes upon thee. No state is so far off from true consolation, and so full of horrors, as that of the rotten-hearted hypocrite: his rotten heart is sooner shaken to pieces than any other. If you would have heart-peace in God, you must have this heart-sanctifying of him. It is the heart that is vexed and troubled with fears, the disease is there; and if the prescribed remedy reach not thither, it will do no good. But let your hearts sanctify him, and then he shall fortify and establish your hearts.

This sanctifying of God in the heart, composes the heart, and frees it from fears.

First, In general, the turning of the heart to consider and regard God, takes it off from those vain, empty, windy things, that are the usual causes and matter of its fears. It feeds on wind, and therefore the bowels are tormented within. The heart is subject to disturbance, because it lets out itself to such things, and lets in such things into itself, as are ever in motion, and full of instability and restlessness; and so it cannot be at quiet, till God comes in and casts out these, and keeps the heart within, that it wander out no more to them.

Second, Fear and faith in the believer more particularly work in this.

1. That fear, as greatest, overtops and nullifies all lesser fears: the heart possessed with this fear, hath no room for the other. It resolves the heart,

in point of duty, what it should and must do: that it must not offend God by any means, lays that down as indisputable, and so eases it of doubtings and debates in that kind—whether shall I comply with the world, and abate somewhat of the sincerity and exact way of religion to please men, or to escape persecution or reproaches: no, it is unquestionably best, and only necessary "to obey him rather than men," to retain his favour, be it with displeasing the most respected and considerable persons we know; yea, rather to choose the universal and highest displeasure of all the world for ever, than his smallest discountenance for a moment. It counts that the only indispensable necessity, to cleave unto God, and obey him. If I pray, I shall be accused, might Daniel think, but yet, pray I must, come on it what will. So, if I worship God in my prayer, they will mock me, I shall pass for a fool; no matter for that, it must be done: I must call on God, and strive to walk with him. This sets the mind at ease, not to be halting betwixt two opinions, but resolved what to do. "We are not careful," said they, "to answer thee, O king—our God can deliver us," but if not, this we have put out of deliberation, "we will not worship the image," Dan. iii. 16. As one said, *Non oportet vivere, sed oportet navigare*, so we may say, It is not necessary to have the favour of the world, nor to have riches, nor to live, but it is necessary to hold fast the truth, and to walk holily, to sanctify the name of our Lord, and honour him, whether in life or death.

2. Faith in God clears the mind, and dispels carnal fears. It is the most sure help: "What time I am afraid," says David, "I will trust in thee," Psa. lvi. 3. It resolves the mind concerning

the event, and scatters the multitude of perplexing thoughts which arise about that: What shall become of this and that? What if such an enemy prevail? What if the place of our abode grow dangerous, and we be not provided, as others are, for a removal? No matter, says faith, though all fail, I know of one thing that will not; I have a refuge which all the strength of nature and art cannot break in upon or demolish; "a high defence, my rock in whom I trust," Psa. lxii. 5, 6. The firm belief of and resting on his power, and wisdom, and love, gives a clear satisfying answer to all doubts and fears. It suffers us not to stand to jangle with each trifling, grumbling objection, but carries all before it, makes day in the soul, and so chases away those fears that vex us only in the dark, as affrightful fancies do. This is indeed "to sanctify God," and to give him his own glory, to "rest on him." And it is a fruitful homage which is thus done to him, returning us so much peace and victory over fears and troubles, in the persuasion that nothing "can separate from his love;" that only we feared, and so, the things that cannot reach that, can be easily despised.

Seek to have the Lord in your hearts, and sanctify him there. He shall make them strong, and carry them through all dangers. "Though I walk," says David, "through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me," Psa. xxiii. 4. So xxvii. 1. What is it that makes the church so firm and stout: "Though the sea roar, and the mountains be cast into the midst of the sea, yet we will not fear?" It is this: "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved," Psa. xlvi. 2, 5. No wonder; he is immovable, and therefore doth

establish all where he resides. If the world be in the middle of the heart, it will be often shaken, for all there is continual motion and change; but God in it, keeps it stable. Labour, therefore, to get God into your hearts, residing in the midst of them, and then, in the midst of all conditions, they shall not move.

Our condition is universally exposed to fears and troubles, and no man is so stupid but he studies and projects for some fence against them, some bulwark to break the incursion of evils, and so to bring his mind to some ease, ridding it of the fear of them. Thus the most vulgar spirits do in their way; for even the brutes, from whom such do not much differ in their actings, and course of life too, are instructed by nature to provide themselves and their young ones with shelters, the birds their nests, and the beasts their holes and dens. Thus, men gape and pant after gain with a confused, ill-examined fancy of quiet and safety in it, if once they might reach such a day, as to say with the rich fool in the gospel, "Soul, take thine ease, thou hast much goods laid up for many years;" though warned by his short ease, and by many watch-words, yea, by daily experience, that days may come, yea, one day will, when fear and trouble shall rush in, and break over the highest tower of riches; that there is a day, called the "day of wrath," wherein they "profit not at all," Prov. xi. 4. Thus, men seek safety in the greatness or multitude, or supposed faithfulness of friends; they seek by any means to be strongly underset this way, to have many, and powerful, and trust-worthy friends. But wiser men, perceiving the unsafety and vanity of these and all external things, have cast about for some higher course.

They see a necessity of withdrawing a man from externals, which do nothing but mock and deceive those most who trust most to them; but they cannot tell whither to direct him. The best of them bring him *into himself*, and think to quiet him so, but the truth is, he finds as little to support him there; there is nothing truly strong enough within him, to hold out against the many sorrows and fears which still from without do assault him. So then, though it is well done, to call off a man from outward things, as moving sands, that he build not on them, yet this is not enough; for his own spirit is as unsettled a piece as is in all the world, and must have some higher strength than its own, to fortify and fix it. This is the way that is here taught, "Fear not their fear, but sanctify the Lord your God in your hearts;" and if you can attain this latter, the former will follow of itself.

In the general, then, God, taking the place formerly possessed by things full of motion and unquietness, makes firm and establishes the heart. More particularly,

On the one hand, the fear of God turns other fears out of doors; there is no room for them where this great fear is; and though greater than they all, yet, it disturbs not as they do, yea, it brings as great quiet as they brought trouble. It is an ease to have but one thing for the heart to deal withal, for many times the multitude of carnal fears is more troublesome than their weight, as flies that vex most by their number.

Again, this fear is not a terrible apprehension of God as an enemy, but a sweet composed reverence of God as our King, yea, as our Father; as very great, but no less good than great; so highly

esteeming his favour, as fearing most of all things to offend him in any kind; especially if the soul should either have been formerly, on the one hand, under the lash of his apprehended displeasure, or, on the other side, have had some sensible tastes of his love, and have been entertained in his "banqueting house," where his banner over it was love, Cant. ii. 4.

His children fear him for his goodness; are afraid to lose sight of that, or to deprive themselves of any of its influences; desire to live in his favour, and then, for other things they are not very thoughtful.

On the other hand, faith carries the soul above all doubts, assures it that if sufferings, or sickness, or death come, nothing can separate it from him. This suffices; yea, what though he may hide his face for a time, though that is the hardest of all, yet there is no separation. Faith sets the soul in God, and where is safety, if it be not there? It rests on those persuasions it hath concerning him, and that interest it hath in him. Faith believes that he sits and rules the affairs of the world, with an all-seeing eye, and an all-moving hand. The greatest affairs surcharge him not, and the very smallest escape him not. He orders the march of all armies, and the events of battles; and yet, thou and thy particular condition slip not out of his view. The very "hairs of thy head are numbered;" are not then all thy steps and the hazards of them known to him, and all thy desires before him? Doth he not "number thy wanderings," every weary step thou art driven to, and "put thy tears in his bottle?" Psa. lvi. 8. Thou mayest assure thyself, that however thy matters seem to go, all is contrived to subserve thy

good, especially thy chief and highest good. There is a regular motion in them, though the wheels do seem to run cross. "All these things are against me," said old Jacob, and yet they were all for him.

In all states, I know of no heart's ease, but to believe; to sanctify and honour thy God, in resting on his word. If thou art persuaded of his love, surely that will carry thee above all distrustful fears. If thou art not clear in that point, yet depend and resolve to stay by him, yea, to stay on him, till he show himself unto thee. Thou hast some fear of him; thou canst not deny it without gross injury to him and thyself; thou wouldst willingly walk in all well-pleasing unto him: well then, "who is among you that feareth the Lord, though he see no present light, yet, let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God," Isa. l. 10. Press this upon thy soul, for there is not such another charm for all its fears and disquiet; therefore, repeat it still with David, sing this still, till it be stilled, and chide thy distrustful heart into believing: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? why art thou disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise him," Psa. xliii. 5. Though I am all out of tune for the present, never a right string in my soul, yet, he will put forth his hand, and redress all, and I "shall yet once again praise," and therefore even now I will hope.

It is true, some may say, God is a safe shelter and refuge, but he is holy, and holy men may find admittance and protection, but can so vile a sinner as I look to be protected and taken in under his safeguard? Go try. "Knock" at his door, "and" (take it not on our word, but on his own) "it shall

be opened to thee ;" that once done, thou shalt have a happy life of it in the worst times. Faith hath this privilege, never to be ashamed ; it takes sanctuary in God, and sits and sings "under the shadow of his wings," as David speaks, Psa. lxiii. 7.

Whence the unsettledness of men's minds in trouble, or when it is near, but because they are far off from God ? The heart is shaken as the leaves of the tree with the wind, there is no stability of spirit ; God is not sanctified in it, and no wonder, for he is not known. Strange this ignorance of God, and of the precious promises of his word ! The most, living and dying strangers to him ! When trouble comes, they have not him "as a known refuge," but have to begin to seek after him, and to inquire the way to him ; they cannot go to him as acquainted, and engaged by his own covenant with them. Others have some empty knowledge, and can discourse of Scripture, and sermons, and spiritual comforts, while yet they have none of that fear and trust which quiet the soul : they have notions of God in their heads, but God is not sanctified in their hearts.

If you will be advised, this is the way to have a high and strong spirit indeed, and to be above troubles and fears : seek for a more lively and divine knowledge of God than most as yet have, and rest not till you bring him into your hearts, and then you shall rest indeed in him.

Sanctify him by fearing him. "Let him be your fear and your dread," not only as to outward, gross offences ; fear an oath, fear to profane the Lord's holy day, but fear also all irregular earthly desires ; fear the distempered affecting of any thing, the entertaining of any thing in the secret of your hearts,

that may give distaste to your Beloved. Take heed, respect the Great Person you have in your company, who lodges within you, the Holy Spirit. "Grieve him not;" it will turn to your own grief if you do, for all your comfort is in his hand, and flows from him. If you be but in heart dallying with sin, it will unfit you for suffering outward troubles, and make your spirit low and base in the day of trial, yea, it will fill you with inward trouble, and disturb that peace, which, I am sure, you who know it esteem more than all the peace and flourishing of this world. Outward troubles do not molest or stir inward peace, but an unholy, unsanctified affection doth. All the winds without cause not an earthquake, but that within its own bowels doth. Christians are much their own enemies in unwary walking; hereby they deprive themselves of those comforts they might have in God, and so are often almost as perplexed and full of fears, upon small occasions, as worldlings are.

Sanctify him by believing. Study the main question, your *reconcilement* with him; labour to bring that to some point, and then, in all other occurrences, faith will uphold you, by enabling you to rely on God as now yours. For these three things make up the soul's peace: 1. To have right apprehensions of God, looking on him in Christ, and according to that covenant that holds in him. And, 2. A particular apprehension, that is, laying hold on him in that covenant as gracious and merciful, as satisfied and appeased in Christ, smelling in his sacrifice, which was himself, a savour of rest, and setting himself before me, that I may rely on him in that notion. 3. A persuasion that, by so relying on him, my soul is as one, yea, is one with him.

Yet, while this is wanting, as to a believer it may be, the other is our duty, to sanctify the Lord in believing the word of grace, and believing on him, reposing on his word. And this, even severed from the other, doth deliver, in a good measure, from distracting fears and troubles, and sets the soul at safety.

Whence is it, that in times of persecution or trouble men are troubled within, and racked with fears, but because, instead of depending upon God, their hearts are glued to such things as are in hazard by those troubles without, their estates, or their ease, or their lives? The soul destitute of God esteems so highly these things, that it cannot but exceedingly feel when they are in danger, and fear their loss most, gaping after some imagined good: Oh! if I had but this, I were well! but then, such or such a thing may drop in and break all my projects. And this troubles the poor spirit of the man who hath no higher designs than such as are so easily blasted, and still, as any thing in man lifts up his soul to "vanity," it must needs fall down again into "vexation." There is a word or two in the Hebrew for idols, that signify withal, troubles,* and terrors.† And so it is certainly: all our idols prove so to us; they fill us with nothing but anguish and troubles, with unprofitable cares and fears, that are good for nothing, but to be fit punishments of that folly out of which they arise. The ardent love or self-willed desire of prosperity, or wealth, or credit

* [*Tigirim,*] Isa. xlv. 16, from [*Tszus,*] arctavit, hostiliter egit.

† [*Miphletzeth,*] 1 Kings xv. 13, from [*Phalatz,*] contremiscere, et [*Emim,*] Job xv. 24, from [*Aim,*] formidabilis, terrificus.

in the world, carries with it, as inseparably tied to it, a bundle of fears and inward troubles. "They that will be rich," says the apostle, "fall into a snare, and many noisome and hurtful lusts," and, as he adds in the next verse, "they pierce themselves through with many sorrows," 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10. He who hath set his heart upon an estate, or a commodious dwelling and lands, or upon a healthful and long life, cannot but be in continued alarms, renewing his fears concerning them. Especially in troublous times, the least rumour of any thing that threateneth to deprive him of those advantages, strikes him to the heart, because his heart is in them. I am well seated, thinks he, and I am of a sound, strong constitution, and may have many a good day. Oh! but besides the arrows of pestilence that are flying round about, the sword of a cruel enemy is not far off. This will affright and trouble a heart void of God. But if thou wouldst readily answer and dispel all these, and such like fears, "sanctify the Lord God in thy heart." The soul that eyes God, renounces these things, looks on them at a great distance, as things far from the heart, and which therefore cannot easily trouble it, but it looks on God as within the heart, "sanctifies him in it," and rests on him.

The word of God cures the many foolish hopes and fears that we are naturally subject to, by representing to us hopes and fears of a far higher nature, which swallow up and drown the other as inundations and land-floods do the little ditches in those meadows that they overflow. "Fear not," says our Saviour, "them which can kill the body"—What then? Fear must have some work—He adds, "But fear Him who can kill both soul and body." Thus,

in the passage cited here, "Fear not their fear, but sanctify the Lord, and let him be your fear and your dread." And so, as for the hopes of the world, care not though you lose them for God; there is a "hope in you," (as it follows here,) that is far above them.

"Be ready always to give an answer." The real Christian is *all for Christ*, hath given up all right of himself to his Lord and Master, to be all his, to do and suffer for him, and, therefore, he surely will not fail in this which is least, to speak for him upon all occasions. If he sanctify him in his heart, the tongue will follow, "and be ready (πρὸς ἀπολογίαν) to give an answer," a defence or apology. Of this, here are four things to be noted.

1. The need of it—Men will ask an account.
2. The matter or subject of it—The hope in you.
3. The manner—With meekness and fear.
4. The faculty for it—Be ready.

1. The need of a defence or apology. Religion is always the thing in the world that hath the greatest calumnies and prejudices cast upon it; and this engages those who love it, to endeavour to clear and disburden it of them. This they do chiefly by the course of their lives. The saints, by their blameless actions and patient sufferings, do write most real and convincing *apologies;* yet sometimes it is expedient, yea, necessary to add verbal defences, and to vindicate not so much themselves, as their Lord and his truth, as suffering in the reproaches cast upon them. Did they rest in their own persons, a regardless contempt of them were usually the fittest answer; *spreta vilescerent.* But where the holy profession of Christians is likely to receive either the main or the indirect blow, and a word of defence may

do any thing to ward it off, there we ought not to spare to do it.

Christian prudence goes a great way in the regulating of this; for holy things are not to be cast to dogs. Some are not capable of receiving rational answers, especially divine things; they were not only lost upon them, but religion dishonoured by the contest. But we are to answer every one that inquires a reason, or an account; which supposes something receptive of it. We ought to judge ourselves engaged to give it, be it an enemy, if he will hear; if it gain him not, it may in part convince and cool him; much more, should it be one who ingenuously inquires for satisfaction, and possibly inclines to receive the truth, but is prejudiced against it by false misrepresentations of it: for Satan and the profane world are very inventive of such shapes and colours as may make truth most odious, drawing monstrous misconsequences out of it, and belying the practices of Christians, making their assemblies horrible and vile by false imputations; and thus are they often necessitated to declare the true tenor, both of their belief and their lives, in confessions of faith, and remonstrances of their carriage and custom.

The very name of Christians, in the primitive times, was made hateful by the foulest aspersions of strange wickednesses committed in their meetings; and these passed credibly through with all who were not particularly acquainted with them. Thus it also was with the Waldenses; and so, both were forced to publish apologies. And, as here enjoined, every one is bound seasonably to clear himself, and his brethren, and religion; "Be ye always ready." It is not always to be done to every one, but being

ready to do it, we must consider when, and to whom, and how far. But,

2. All that they are to give account of is comprised here under this, "The hope that is in you." Faith is the root of all graces, of all obedience and holiness; and hope is so near in nature to it, that the one is commonly named for the other; for the things that faith apprehends and lays hold on as present, in the truth of Divine promises, hope looks out for as to come, in their certain performance. To believe a promise to be true before it is performed, is no other than to believe that it shall be performed; and hope expects that.

Many rich and excellent things do the saints receive, even in their mean, despised condition here; but their hope is rather mentioned as the subject they may speak and give account of with most advantage, both because all they receive, at present, is but as nothing compared with what they hope for, and because, such as it is, it cannot be made known at all to a natural man, being so clouded with their afflictions and sorrows. These he sees, but their graces and comforts he cannot see; and, therefore, the very ground of higher hopes, of somewhat to come, though he knows not what it is, speaks more satisfaction. To hear of another life, and a happiness hoped for, any man will confess it says something, and deserves to be considered.

So, then, the whole sum of religion goes under this word, "the hope that is in you," for two reasons: first, for that it doth indeed all resolve and terminate into things to come; and secondly, as it leads and carries on the soul towards them by all the graces in it, and all the exercise of them, and through all services and sufferings; aiming at this,

as its main scope, to keep that life to come in the believer's eye, till he get it in his hand; to sustain the hope of it, and bring him home to possess it. Therefore the apostle calls faith, "the substance of things hoped for," that which makes them be before they be, gives a solidity and substance to them. The name of hope, in other things, scarcely suits with such a meaning, but sounds a kind of uncertainty, and is somewhat airy; for, of all other hopes but this, it is a very true word of Seneca's, *Spes est nomen boni incerti:* "Hope is the name of an uncertain good." But the gospel, being entertained by faith, furnishes a hope that hath substance and reality in it; and all its truths do concentre into this, to give such a hope. There was in St. Paul's word, besides the fitness for his stratagem at that time, a truth suitable to this, where he designates his whole cause for which he was called in question, by the name of his "hope of the resurrection," Acts xxiii. 6.

And, indeed, this hope carries its own apology in it, both for itself and for religion. What can more pertinently answer all exceptions against the way of godliness than this, to represent what hopes the saints have who walk in that way? If you ask, Whither tends all this your preciseness and singularity? Why cannot you live as your neighbours and the rest of the world about you? Truly, the reason is this: we have somewhat further to look to than our present condition, and far more considerable than any thing here; we have a hope of blessedness after time, a hope to dwell in the presence of God, where our Lord Christ is gone before us; and we know that "as many as have this hope must purify themselves, even as he is pure," 1 John iii. 3. The

city we tend to is holy, and "no unclean thing shall enter into it," Rev. xxi. 27. The hopes we have cannot subsist in the way of the ungodly world; they cannot breathe in that air, but are choked and stifled with it; and therefore we must take another way, unless we will forego our hopes, and ruin ourselves for company. But all that bustle of godliness you make is, say you, but ostentation and hypocrisy. That may be your judgment, but, if it were so, we had but a poor bargain. Such persons "have their reward;" that which they desire, to "be seen of men," is given them, and they can look for no more; but we should be loth to have it so with us. That which our eye is upon, is to come; our hopes are the thing which upholds us. We know that we shall appear before the Judge of hearts, where shows and formalities will not pass, and we are persuaded, that "the hope of the hypocrite shall perish," Job viii. 13; no man shall be so much disappointed and ashamed as he. But the hope that we have, "maketh not ashamed," Rom. v. 5. And while we consider that, so far are we from the regarding of men's eyes, that, were it not we are bound to profess our hope, and avow religion, and to walk conformably to it, even before men, we would be content to pass through altogether unseen: and we desire to pass as if it were so, as regardless either of the approbation, or of the reproaches and mistakes of men, as if there were no such thing, for it is indeed nothing.

Yea, the hopes we have make all things sweet. Therefore do we go through disgraces and sufferings with patience, yea, with joy, because of that hope of glory and joy laid up for us. A Christian can "take joyfully the spoiling of his goods, knowing that he

hath in heaven a better and an enduring substance," Heb. x. 34.

"The hope." All the estate of a believer lieth in hope, and it is a royal estate. As for outward things, the children of God have what he thinks fit to serve them, but those are not their portion, and therefore he gives often more of the world to those who shall have no more hereafter; but all their flourish and lustre is but a base advantage, as a lacquey's gaudy clothes, which usually make more show than his who is heir of the estate. How often, under a mean outward condition, and very despicable every way, goes an heir of glory "born of God," and so royal; born to a "crown that fadeth not," an estate of hopes, but so rich and such certain hopes, that the least thought of them surpasses all the world's possessions! Men think of somewhat for the present, "a bird in hand," as you say, the best of it; but the odds is in this, that when all present things shall be past and swept away, as if they had not been, then shall these hopers be in eternal possession; *they* only shall have all for ever, who seemed to have little or nothing here.

Oh! how much happier, to be the meanest expectant of the glory to come, than the sole possessor of all this world! These expectants are often kept short in earthly things, and, had they the greatest abundance of them, yet they cannot rest in that. Even so, all the spiritual blessings that they do possess here, are nothing to "the hope that is in them," but as an earnest penny to their great inheritance, which, indeed, confirms their hope, and assures unto them that full estate; and therefore, be it ever so small, they may look on it with joy, not so much regarding it simply in itself, as in relation to that

which it seals and ascertains the soul of. Be it ever so small, yet it is a pledge of the great glory and happiness which we desire to share in.

It is the grand comfort of a Christian, to look often beyond all that he can possess or attain here; and as to answer others, when he is put to it concerning his hope, so to answer himself concerning all his present griefs and wants: I have a poor traveller's lot here, little friendship and many straits, but yet I may go cheerfully homewards, for thither I shall come, and there I have riches and honour enough, a palace and a crown abiding me. Here, nothing but "depth calling unto depth," one calamity and trouble, as waves, following another: but I have a hope of that "rest that remaineth for the people of God." I feel the infirmities of a mortal state, but my hopes of immortality content me under them. I find strong and cruel assaults of temptations breaking in upon me, but, for all that, I have the assured hope of a full victory, and then, of everlasting peace. "I find a law in my members" rebelling against "the law of my mind," which is the worst of all evils, so much strength of corruption within me; yet, there is withal a hope within me of deliverance, and I look over all to that; "I lift up my head, because the day of my redemption draws nigh." This I dare avow and proclaim to all, and am not ashamed to answer concerning this blessed hope.

3. But for the manner of this: it is to be done with "meekness and fear;" meekness towards men, and reverential fear towards God.

"With meekness." A Christian is not, therefore, to be blustering and flying out into invectives, because he hath the better of it, against any man that

questions him touching this hope; as some think themselves certainly authorized to rough speech, because they plead for truth, and are on its side. On the contrary, so much the rather study meekness, for the glory and advantage of the truth. It needs not the serivce of passion; yea, nothing so disserves it, as passion when set to serve it. The "spirit of truth" is withal the "spirit of meekness." The dove that rested on that great champion of truth, who is the truth itself, is from him derived to the lovers of truth, and they ought to seek the participation of it. Imprudence makes some kind of Christians lose much of their labour, in speaking for religion, and drive those further off, whom they would draw into it.

"And fear." Divine things are never to be spoken of in a light, careless way, but with a reverent, grave temper of spirit; and, for this reason, some choice is to be made both of time and persons. The confidence that attends this hope, makes the believer not fear men, to whom he answers, but still he fears his God, for whom he answers, and whose interest is chief in those things he speaks of. The soul that hath the deepest sense of spiritual things, and the truest knowledge of God, is most afraid to miscarry in speaking of him, most tender and wary how to acquit itself when engaged to speak of and for God.

4. We have the faculty for this apology, "Be ready." In this are implied knowledge, and affection, and courage. As for knowledge, it is not required of every Christian, to be able to prosecute subtilties, and encounter the sophistry of adversaries, especially in obscure points; but all are bound to know so much, as to be able to aver that hope

which is in them, the main doctrine of grace and salvation, wherein the most of men are lamentably ignorant. Affection sets all on work; whatsoever faculty the mind hath, it will not suffer it to be useless, and it hardens it against hazards in defence of the truth.

But the only way so to know and love the truth, and to have courage to avow it, is, to have the Lord "sanctified in the heart." Men may dispute stoutly against Popery and errors, and yet be strangers to God and this hope. But surely it is the liveliest defence, and that which alone returns comfort within, when it arises from the peculiar interest of the soul in God, and in those truths and that hope which are questioned; it is then like pleading for the nearest friend, and for a man's own rights and inheritance. This will animate and give edge to it, when you apologize, not for a hope you have heard or read of barely, but for a hope "within you;" not merely a hope in believers in general, but in "you," by a particular sense of that hope within.

But, although you should find it not so strong in you, as to your particular interest, yet are you seeking after it, and desiring it mainly? Is it your chief design to attain unto it? Then forbear not, if you have occasion, to speak for it, and commend it to others, and to maintain the sweetness and certainty of it.

And, to the end you may be the more established in it, and so the stronger to answer for it, not only against men, but against that great adversary who seeks so much to infringe and overbear it, know the right foundation of it; build it never on yourselves, or any thing in yourselves. The work of grace may evidence to you the truth of your hope, but the

ground it fastens on is Jesus Christ, in whom all our rights and evidences hold good; his death assuring us of freedom from condemnation, and his life and possession of glory being the foundation of our hope, Heb. vi. 19. If you would have it immovable, rest it there; lay all this hope on him, and, when assaulted, fetch all your answers for it from him, for it is. "Christ in you," that is your "hope of glory," Col. i. 27.

Ver. 16. Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evil-doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

The "prosperity of fools is their destruction," says Solomon, Prov. i. 32. But none of God's children die of this disease—of too much ease. He knows well how to breed them, and fit them for a kingdom. He keeps them in exercise, but yet so as they are not surcharged. He not only directs them how to overcome, but enables and supports them in all their conflicts, and gives them victory. One main thing, tending to their support and victory, is what is here required in the saints, and is withal wrought and maintained in them by the Spirit of God, "Having a good conscience," &c.

I. We have here two parties opposed in contest—the evil tongues of the ungodly, and the good conscience and conversation of the Christian: "they speak evil of you, and falsely accuse you," but do you have "a good conscience."

II. The success of their contest: the good conscience prevails, and the evil speakers are ashamed.

I. The parties engaged: "They speak evil." This is a general evil in the corrupt nature of man, though

in some it rises to a greater height than in others. Are not tables and chambers, and almost all societies and meetings, full of it? And even those who have some dislikings of it, are too easily carried away with the stream, and, for company's sake, take a share, if not by lending their word, yet lending their ear, and willingly hearing the detractions of others: unless it be of their friends, or such as they have interest in, they insensibly slide into some forced complacency, and easily receive the impression of calumnies and defamings. But the most are more active in this evil, can cast in their penny to make up the shot; have their taunt or criticism upon somebody in readiness, to make up the feast, such as most companies entertain one another withal—but it is a vile diet. Satan's name, as the Syriac calls him, is, "an eater of calumnies." This tongue-evil hath its root in the heart, in a perverse constitution there, in pride and self-love. An overweening esteem that men naturally have of themselves, mounts them into the censor's chair, gives them a fancied authority of judging others, and self-love, a desire to be esteemed; and, for that end, they spare not to depress others, and load them with disgraces and injurious censures, seeking upon their ruins to raise themselves: as Sallust speaks, *Ex alieni nominis jactura gradum sibi faciunt ad gloriam.*

But this bent of the unrenewed heart and tongue to evil-speaking, works and vents in the world most against those who walk most contrary to the course of the world: against such, this furnace of the tongue "kindled from hell," as St. James tells us, is made seven times hotter than ordinary. As for sincere Christians, they say, a company of hypocrites,

who so godly? but yet they are false, and malicious, and proud, &c. No kind of carriage in them shall escape, but there shall be some device to wrest and misname it. If they be cheerful in society, that shall be accounted more liberty than suits with their profession; if of a graver or sad temper, that shall pass for sullen severity. Thus perversely were John the Baptist and Christ censured by the Jews, Matt. xi. 18, 19. If they be diligent and wary in their affairs, then, in the world's construction, they are as covetous and worldly as any; if careless and remiss in them, then, silly, witless creatures, good for nothing. Still something stands cross.

The enemies of religion have not any where so quick an eye, as in observing the ways of such "as seek after God:" "My remarkers," David calls them, Psa. lvi. 6,—they who scan my ways, as the word implies,—will not let the least step pass unexamined. If nothing be found faulty, then their invention works, either forging complete falsehoods, or disguising something that lies open to mistake. Or, if they can catch hold on any real failing, there is no end of their triumph and insultations. 1. They aggravate and raise it to the highest. 2. While they will not admit to be themselves judged of by their constant walk, they scruple not to judge of the condition of a Christian by any one particular action wherein he doth, or seems at least to miscarry. 3. They rest not there, but make one failing of one Christian the reproach of all; take up your devotees, there is never a one of them better. 4. Nor rest they there, but make the personal failings of those who profess it, the disgrace of religion itself. Now, all these are very crooked rules, and such as use them are guilty of gross injustice. For,

1. There is a great difference betwixt a thing taken favourably, and the same action misconstrued. And,

2. A great difference betwixt one particular act, and a man's estate or inward frame, which they either consider not, or willingly or maliciously neglect.

3. How large is the difference that there is betwixt one and another in the measure of grace, as well as of prudence, either in their natural disposition, or in grace, or possibly in both! Some who are honest in the matter of religion, yet, being very weak, may miscarry in such things as other Christians come seldom near the hazard of. And though some should wholly forsake the way of godliness, wherein they seemed to walk, yet why should that reflect upon such as are real and stedfast in it? "They went out from us," says the apostle, "but they were not of us," 1 John ii. 19. Offences of this kind must be, but the woe rests on him by whom they come, not on other Christians. And if it spread further than the party offending, the woe is to the profane world, that take offence at religion because of him: as our Saviour hath expressed it, "Woe to the world because of offences!" Matt. xviii. 7; they shall stumble and fall, and break their necks upon these stumbling-blocks or scandals. Thou who art profane, and seest the failing of a minister or Christian, and art hardened by it, this is a judgment to thee, that thou meetest with such a block in thy way. "Woe to the world!" It is a judgment on a place, when God permits religion, in the persons of some, to be scandalous.

4. Religion itself remains still the same: whatsoever be the failings and blots of one or more who

profess it, it is itself pure and spotless. If it teach not holiness, and meekness, and humility, and all good, purely, then except against it. But if it be a "straight golden reed" by which the temple is measured, Rev. xxi. 15, then let it have its own esteem, both of straightness and preciousness, whatsoever unevenness be found in those who profess to receive it.

Suspect and search yourselves, even in general, for this evil of evil speaking. Consider that we are to give [λογον λογῶν] "an account of words;" and if of idle [ἄργον ῥῆμα] "workless words," how much more of lying or biting words!—*De verbo mendaci aut mordaci*, as St. Bernard has it. Learn more humility and self-censure. Blunt that fire-edge upon your own hard and disordered hearts, that others may meet with nothing but charity and lenity at your hands.

But particularly beware of this, in more or less, in earnest or in jest, to reproach religion, or those who profess it. Know how particularly the glorious name of God is interested in that; and they who dare be affronting him, what shall they say? How shall they stand, when he calls them to account? If you have not attained to it, yet do not bark against it, but the rather esteem highly of religion. Love it, and the very appearance of it, wherever you find it. Give it respect and your good word at least; and, from an external approbation, oh! that you would aspire to inward acquaintance with it, and then no more were needful to be said in this: it would commend itself to you sufficiently. But, in the mean time, be ashamed, be afraid of that professed enmity against God that is amongst you; a malignant, hateful spirit against those who

desire to walk holily, whetting your tongues against them.

Consider, what do you mean? This religion which we all profess, is it the way to heaven, or is it not? Do you believe this word, or not? If you do not, what do you here? If you do, then you must believe too, that those who walk closest by this rule are surest in that way; those who dare not share in your oaths, and excessive cups, and profane conversation. What can you say? It is not possible to open your mouth against them, without renouncing this word and faith: therefore, either declare you are no Christians, and that Christ is not yours, or, in his name, I enjoin you, that you dare no more speak an ill word of Christianity, and the power of religion, and those who seek after it. There are not many higher signs of a reprobate mind, than to have a bitter, virulent spirit against the children of God. Seek that tie of affection and fraternity, on which the beloved apostle, St. John, lays such stress, when he says, "Hereby we know that we are translated from death to life, because we love the brethren," 1 John iii. 14.

But because those hissings are the natural voice of the serpent's seed, expect them, you that have a mind to follow Christ, and take this guard against them that you are here directed to take: "Having a good conscience."

It is a fruitless verbal debate, whether conscience be a faculty or habit, or not. As in other things, so in this, which most of all requires more solid and useful consideration, the vain mind of man feedeth on the wind, loves to be busy to no purpose, *magno conatu magnas nugas*. How much better is it to have this supernatural goodness of conscience, than

to dispute about the nature of it; to find it duly teaching and admonishing, reproving and comforting, rather than to define it most exactly! *Malo sentire compunctionem, quam scire ejus definitionem.*

When all is examined, conscience will be found to be no other than the mind of man under the notion of a particular reference to himself and his own actions. And there is a twofold goodness of the conscience, purity and tranquillity; and this latter flows from the former, so that the former is the thing we ought primarily to study, and the latter will follow of itself. For a time, indeed, the conscience, that is in a good measure pure, may be unpeaceable, but still it is the apprehension and sense of present or former impurity, that makes it so; for, without the consideration of guiltiness, there is nothing that can trouble it: it cannot apprehend the wrath of God, but with relation unto sin.

The goodness of conscience here recommended, is, the integrity and holiness of the whole inward man in a Christian. So, the ingredients of it are, 1. A due light or knowledge of our rule: that, like the lamps in the temple, must be still burning within, as filthiness is always the companion of darkness. Therefore, if you would have a good conscience, you must by all means have so much light, so much knowledge of the will of God, as may regulate you, and show you your way, may teach you how to do, and speak, and think, as in his presence.

2. A constant regard and using of this light, applying it to all things; not sleeping, but working by it; still seeking a nearer conformity with the known will of our God; daily redressing and ordering the affections by it; not sparing to knock off whatsoever we find irregular within, that our hearts

may be polished and brought to a right frame by that rule. And this is the daily inward work of the Christian, his great business, "to purify himself as the Lord is pure," 1 John iii. 3.

And, 3. For the advancing of this work, there is needful a frequent search of our hearts and of our actions, not only to consider what we are to do, but what we have done. These reflex inquiries, as they are a main part of the conscience's proper work, are a chief means of making and keeping the conscience good; first, by acquainting the soul with its own state, with the motions and inclinations that are most natural to it; secondly, by stirring it up to work out, and purge away by repentance, the pollution it hath contracted by any outward act or inward motion of sin; and, thirdly, this search both excites and enables the conscience to be more watchful; teaches how to avoid and prevent the like errors for the time to come. As natural wise men labour to gain thus much out of their former oversights in their affairs, to be the wiser and warier by them, and lay up that as bought wit, which they have paid dear for, and therefore are careful to make their best advantage of it; so God makes the consideration of their falls preservatives to his children from falling again, makes a medicine of this poison.

Thus, that the conscience may be good, it must be enlightened, and it must be watchful, both advising before, and after censuring, according to that light.

The greater part of mankind little regard this: they walk by guess, having perhaps ignorant consciences, and the blind, you say, swallow many a fly. Yea, how many consciences are without sense, "as seared with a hot iron," 1 Tim. iv. 2, so stupified,

that they feel nothing! Others rest satisfied with a civil righteousness, an imagined goodness of conscience, because they are free from gross crimes. Others, who know the rule of Christianity, yet study not a conscientious respect to it in all things: they cast some transient looks upon the rule and their own hearts, it may be, but sit not down to compare them, make it not their business, have time for any thing but that, *Non vacant bonæ menti.* They do not, with St. Paul, exercise themselves in this, "to have a conscience void of offence towards God and men," Acts xxiv. 16. Those were his ascetics [ἀσκῶ]; he exhausted himself in striving against what might defile the conscience; or, as the word signifies, "elaborately wrought and dressed" his conscience, [Ασκήσασα χιτῶνα,] Hom. Think you, while other things cannot be done without diligence and intention, that this is a work to be done at random? No, it is the most exact and curious of all works, to have the conscience right, and keep it so; as watches, or other such neat pieces of workmanship, except they be daily wound up and skilfully handled, will quickly go wrong. Yea, besides daily inspection, conscience should, like those, at some times be taken to pieces, and more accurately cleansed, for the best kept will gather soil and dust. Sometimes a Christian should set himself to a more solemn examination of his own heart, beyond his daily search; and all little enough to have so precious a good as this, a good conscience. They who are most diligent and vigilant, find nothing to abate as superfluous, but still need of more. The heart is to be "kept with all diligence," or above all keeping, Prov. iv. 23. Corruption within is ready to grow and gain upon it, if it be ever so little neglected,

and from without, to invade it and get in. We breathe in a corrupt, infected air, and have need daily to antidote the heart against it.

You that are studying to be excellent in this art of a good conscience, go on, seek daily progress in it. The study of conscience is a more sweet, profitable study than that of all science, wherein is much vexation, and, for the most part, little or no fruit. Read this book diligently, and correct your errata by that other book, the word of God. Labour to have it pure and right. Other books and works are [περιεργὰ] curious, and [παρεργὰ] by-works, they shall not appear; but this is one of the books that shall be opened in that great day, "according to which we must be judged," Rev. xx. 12.

On this follows a good conversation, as inseparably connected with a good conscience. Grace is of a lively, active nature, and doth act like itself. Holiness in the heart, will be holiness in the life too; not some good actions, but a good conversation, a uniform, even tract of life, the whole revolution of it regular. The inequality of some Christians' ways doth breed much discredit to religion, and discomfort to themselves.

But observe here, 1. The order of these two. 2. The principle of both.

1. The order. First, the conscience good, and then, the conversation. "Make the tree good, and the fruit will be good," says our Saviour, Matt. xii. 33. So, here, a good conscience is the root of a good conversation. Most men begin at the wrong end of this work. They would reform the outward man first: that will do no good, it will be but dead work.

Do not rest upon external reformations, they will

not hold; there is no abiding, nor any advantage in such a work. You think, when reproved, Oh! I will mend and set about the redress of some outward things. But this is as good as to do nothing. The "mind and conscience being defiled," as the apostle speaks, Tit. i. 15, doth defile all the rest: it is a mire in the spring; although the pipes are cleansed, they will grow quickly foul again. If Christians, in their progress in grace, would eye this most, that the conscience be growing purer, the heart more spiritual, the affections more regular and heavenly, their outward carriage would be holier; whereas the outward work of performing duties, and being much exercised in religion, may, by the neglect of this, be labour in vain, and amend nothing soundly. To set the outward actions right, though with an honest intention, and not so to regard and find out the inward disorder of the heart, whence that in the actions flows, is but to be still putting the index of a clock right with your finger, while it is foul or out of order within, which is a continual business, and does no good. Oh! but a purified conscience, a soul renewed and refined in its temper and affections, will make things go right without, in all the duties and acts of our callings.

2. The principle of good in both, is Christ: "Your good conversation in Christ." The conversation is not good, unless in him; so neither is the conscience.

(1.) "In Him," as to our persons: we must be in him, and then, the conscience and conversation will be good in him. The conscience that is morally good, having some kind of virtuous habits, yet being out of Christ, is nothing but pollution in the sight of God. It must be washed in his blood, ere it can

be clean; all our pains will not cleanse it, floods of tears will not do it; it is blood, and that blood alone that hath the virtue of "purging the conscience from dead works," Heb. ix. 14.

(2.) "In Him," as the perfect pattern of holiness; the heart and life must be conformed to him, and so made truly good.

(3.) 'In Him," as the source of grace, whence it is first derived, and always fed, and maintained, and made active: a spirit goes forth from him that cleanseth our spirits, and so, makes our conversation clean and holy.

If thou wouldst have thy conscience and heart purified and pacified, and have thy life certified, go to Christ for all, make use of him; as of his blood to wash off thy guiltiness, so of his Spirit to purify and sanctify thee. If thou wouldst have thy heart reserved for God, pure as his temple; if thou wouldst have thy lusts cast out which pollute thee, and findest no power to do it; go to him, desire him to scourge out that filthy rabble, which abuse his house and make it a den of thieves. Seek this, as the only way to have thy soul and thy ways righted, to "be in Christ," and then, "walk in him." Let thy conversation be in Christ. Study him, and follow him: look on his way, on his graces, his obedience, and humility, and meekness, till, by looking on them, they make the very idea of thee new, as the painter doth of a face he would draw to the life. So behold his glory, that thou mayest be "transformed from glory to glory." But, as it is there added, this must be "by the Spirit of the Lord," 2 Cor. iii. 18. Do not, therefore, look on him simply as an example without thee, but as life within thee. Having "received him," walk not only like him, but "in

him," as the apostle St. Paul speaks, Col. ii. 6. And as the word is here, "have your conversation," not only according to Christ, but "in Christ." "Draw from his fulness grace for grace," John i. 16.

II. The other thing in the words is, the advantage of this good conscience and conversation. 1. There is even an external success attends it, in respect of the malicious, ungodly world: "They shall be ashamed that falsely accuse you." Thus often it is even most evident to men; the victory of innocency, silent innocency, most strongly confuting all calumny, making the ungodly, false accusers hide their heads. Thus, without stirring, the integrity of a Christian conquers; as a rock, unremoved, breaks the waters that are dashing against it. And this is not only a lawful, but a laudable way of revenge, shaming calumny out of it, and punishing evil-speakers by well-doing; showing really how false their accusers were. This is the most powerful apology and refutation; as the sophister who would prove there was no motion, was best answered by the philosopher's rising up and walking. And without this good conscience and conversation, we cut ourselves short of other apologies for religion, whatsoever we say for it. One unchristian action will disgrace it more than we can repair by the largest and best framed speeches on its behalf.

Let those, therefore, who have given their names to Christ honour him, and their holy profession, most this way. Speak for him as occasion requires; —why should we not, provided it be "with meekness and fear," as our apostle hath taught?—but let this be the main defence of religion; live suitably to it, and commend it so. Thus all should do who are called Christians; they should adorn that holy

profession with holy conversation. But the most are nothing better than spots and blots, some wallowing in the mire, and provoking one another to all uncleanness. Oh! the unchristian life of Christians! an evil to be much lamented, more than all the troubles we sustain! But these, indeed, do thus deny Christ, and declare that they are not his. So many as have any reality of Christ in you, be so much the more holy, the more wicked the rest are. Strive to make it up, and to honour that name which they disgrace. And if they will reproach you, because ye walk not with them, and cast the mire of false reproaches on you, take no notice, but go on your way; it will dry, and easily rub off. Be not troubled with misjudgings; shame them out of it by your blameless and holy carriage, for that will do most to put lies out of countenance. However, if they continue impudent, the day is at hand, wherein all the enemies of Christ shall be "all clothed over" and covered "with shame," and they who have kept a good conscience, and walked in Christ, "shall lift up their faces with joy."

2. There is an intrinsical good in this goodness of conscience, that sweetens all sufferings: as it follows,—

Ver. 17. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well-doing, than for evil-doing.

There is a necessity of suffering in any way wherein ye can walk;—if ye choose the way of wickedness, you shall not, by doing so, escape suffering;—and that supposed, this is by far the better, to suffer "in well-doing," and "for" it, than to suffer either "for doing evil," or simply to suffer "in

that way," (as the words run,) κακοποιοῦντας πάσχειν, "to suffer doing evil."

The way of the ungodly is not exempt from suffering, even at present. Setting aside the judgment and wrath to come, they often suffer from the hands of men, whether justly or unjustly, and often from the immediate hand of God, who is always just, both in this and the other, causing the sinner "to eat of the fruit of his own ways," Prov. i. 31. When profane, ungodly men offer violences and wrongs one to another, in this God is just against both, in that wherein they themselves are both unjust: they are both rebellious against him, and so, though they intend not to take up his quarrel, he means it himself, and sets them to lash one another. The wicked profess their combined enmity against the children of God, yet they are not always at peace amongst themselves: they often revile and defame each other, and so it is kept up on both sides. Whereas the godly cannot hold them game in that, being like their Lord, "who, when he was reviled, reviled not again." Besides, although the ungodly flourish at some times, yet they have their days of suffering, are subject to the common miseries of the life of man, and the common calamities of evil times; the sword and the pestilence, and such like public judgments. Now, in what kind soever it be that they suffer, they are at a great disadvantage, compared with the godly, in their sufferings.

Here impure consciences may lie sleeping, while men are at ease themselves; but when any great trouble comes and shakes them, then, suddenly, the conscience begins to awake and bustle, and proves more grievous to them than all that comes on them from without. When they remember their despising

of the ways of God, their neglecting of him and holy things, whence they are convinced how comfort might be reaped in these days of distress, this cuts and galls them most, looking back at their licentious, profane ways; each of them strikes to the heart. As the apostle calls sin, "the sting of death," so is it of all sufferings, and the sting that strikes deepest into the very soul: no stripes are like those that are secretly given by an accusing conscience. *Surdo verbere cedit.* JUV.

A sad condition it is, to have from thence the greatest anguish, whence the greatest comfort should be expected; to have thickest darkness, whence they should look for the clearest light. Men who have evil consciences, love not to be with them, are not much with themselves: as St. Augustine compares them to such as have shrewd wives, they love not to be much at home. But yet, outward distress sets a man inward, as foul weather drives him home, and there, where he should find comfort, he is met with such accusations as are "like a continual dropping," as Solomon speaks of a contentious woman, Prov. xix. 13. It is a most wretched state, to live under sufferings or afflictions of any kind, and be a stranger to God; for a man to have God and his conscience against him, that should be his solace in times of distress; being knocked off from the comforts of the world, whereon he rested, and having no provision of spiritual comfort within, nor expectation from above.

But the children of God, in their sufferings, especially in such as are encountered for God, can retire within themselves, and rejoice in the testimony of a good conscience, yea, in the possession of Christ

dwelling within them. All the trouble that befalls them, is but as the rattling of hail upon the tiles of the house, to a man who is sitting within a warm room at a rich banquet; and such is a good conscience, a feast, yea, "a continual feast." The believer looks on his Christ, and in him reads his deliverance from condemnation, and that is a strong comfort, a cordial that keeps him from fainting in the greatest distresses. When the conscience gives this testimony, that sin is forgiven, it raises the soul above outward sufferings. Tell the Christian of loss of goods, or liberty, or friends, or life, he answers all with this: Christ is mine, and my sin is pardoned; that is enough for me. What would I not have suffered, to have been delivered from the wrath of God, if any suffering of mine in this world could have done that? Now that is done to my hand, all other sufferings are light; they are "light" and "but for a moment." One thought of eternity drowns the whole time of the world's duration, which is but as one instant, or twinkling of an eye, betwixt eternity before, and eternity after; how much less is any short life, (and a small part of that is spent in sufferings,) yea, what is it, though it were all sufferings without interruption, which yet it is not! When I look forward to the crown, all vanishes, and I think it "less than nothing." Now, these things the good conscience speaks to the Christian in his sufferings; therefore, certainly, his choice is best, who provides it for his companion against evil and troublous times. If moral integrity went so far, (as truly it did in some men who had much of it,) that they scorned all hard encounters, and esteemed this a sufficient bulwark, a strength

impregnable, [*Hic murus aheneus esto, nil conscire sibi,*] how much more the Christian's good conscience, which alone is truly such!

As the Christian may thus look inward, and rejoice in tribulation, so there is another look, upward, that is here likewise mentioned, that allays very much all the sufferings of the saints; "if the will of God be so."

The Christian mind hath still one eye to this, looking above the hand of men, and all inferior causes, in suffering, whether for the name of God, or otherwise; he looks on the sovereign will of God, and sweetly complies with that in all. Neither is there any thing that doth more powerfully compose and quiet the mind than this; it makes it invincibly firm and content, when it hath attained this self-resignation to the will of God, so as to agree to that in every thing. This is the very thing wherein tranquillity of spirit lies: it is no riddle, nor hard to be understood, yet few attain it. And, I pray you, what is gained by our reluctances and repinings, but pain to ourselves? God "doth what he will," whether we consent, or not. Our disagreeing doth not prevent his purposes, but our own peace: if we will not be led, we are drawn. We must suffer, if he will; but if we will what he wills, even in suffering, that makes it sweet and easy; when our mind goes along with his, and we willingly move with that stream of providence, which will carry us with it, even though we row against it; in which case we still have nothing but toil and weariness for our pains.

But this hard argument of necessity, is needless to the child of God, who, persuaded of the wisdom and love of his Father, knows that to be truly best for

him that his hand bestows. Sufferings are unpleasant to the flesh, and it will grumble; but the voice of the Spirit of God, in his children, is that of that good king, Isa. xxxix. 8, "Good is the word of the Lord." Let him do with me as seemeth good in his eyes. My foolish heart would think these things I suffer might be abated, but my wise and heavenly Father thinks otherwise. He hath his design of honour to himself, and good to me in these, which I would be loth to cross if I might. I might do God more service by those temporal advantages, but doth not he know best what is fit? Cannot he advance his grace more by the want of these things I desire, than I could do myself by having them? Cannot he make me a gainer by sickness, and poverty, and disgraces, and loss of friends and children, by making up all in himself, and teaching me more of his all-sufficiency? Yea, even concerning the affairs of my soul, I am to give up all to his good pleasure. Though I desire the light of his countenance above all things in this world, yet, if he see fit to hide it sometimes, if that be his will, let me not murmur. There is nothing lost by this obedient temper; yea, what way soever he deals with us, there is much more advantage in it. No soul shall enjoy so much in all states as that which hath divested and renounced itself, and hath no will but God's.

Ver. 18. For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.

The whole life of a Christian is a steady aiming at conformity with Christ; so that in any thing,

whether doing or suffering, there can be no argument so apposite and persuasive as his example, and no exercise of obedience, either active or passive, so difficult but the view and contemplation of that example will powerfully sweeten it. The apostle doth not decline the frequent use of it. Here we have it thus: "For Christ also suffered."

Though the doctrine of Christian suffering is the occasion of his speaking of Christ's suffering, yet he insists on it beyond the simple necessity of that argument, for its own excellency and for further usefulness. So we shall consider the double capacity. I. As an encouragement and engagement for Christians to suffer. II. As the great point of their faith, whereon all their hopes and happiness depend, being the means of their restoration to God.

I. The due consideration of Christ's sufferings doth much temper all the sufferings of Christians, especially such as are directly for Christ.

It is some known ease to the mind, in any distress, to look upon examples of the like, or greater distress, in present or former times. *Ferre quam sortem patiuntur omnes.* It diverts the eye from continual poring on our own suffering; and, when we return to view it again, it lessens it, abates the imagined bulk and greatness of it. Thus public, thus spiritual troubles are lightened; and particularly the sufferings and temptations of the godly, by the consideration of this as their common lot, their highway, not new in the person of any: "No temptation has befallen you but what is common to men," 1 Cor. x. 13. If we trace the lives of the most eminent saints, shall we not find every notable step that is recorded, marked with a new cross, one trouble following on another, *velut undâ pellitur unda*, as the waves do,

in an incessant succession? Is not this manifest in the life of Abraham, and of Jacob, and the rest of God's worthies, in the Scriptures? And doth not this make it an unreasonable, absurd thought, to dream of an exemption? Would any one have a new untrodden way cut out for him, free of thorns, and strewed with flowers all along? Does he expect to meet with no contradictions, nor hard measure from the world, or imagine that there may be such a dexterity necessary, as to keep its good will, and the friendship of God too? This will not be; and it is a universal conclusion, "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus, must suffer persecution," 2 Tim. iii. 12. This is the path to the kingdom, that which all the sons of God, the heirs of it, have gone in, even Christ; according to that well-known word, One Son without sin, but not one without suffering: "Christ also suffered."

The example and company of the saints in suffering is very considerable, but that of Christ is more so than any other, yea, than all the rest together. Therefore the apostle, having represented the former at large, ends in this, as the top of all, Heb. xii. 1, 2, "There is a race set before us," it is to be run, and "run with patience," and "without fainting:" now, he tells us of a "cloud of witnesses," a cloud made up of instances of believers suffering before us, and the heat of the day wherein we run is somewhat cooled even by that cloud compassing us; but the main strength of our comfort here, lies in "looking to Jesus," in the eyeing of his sufferings and their issue. The considering and contemplating of him will be the strongest cordial, will keep you from "wearying" and "fainting" in the way, as it is verse 3.

The singular power of this instance, lies in many particulars considerable in it. To specify some chief things briefly in the steps of the present words: Consider, 1. The greatness of the example.

(1.) The greatness of the person, Christ, which is marked out to us by the manner of expression, (καὶ Χριστὸς,) Christ also; besides and beyond all others, "even Christ himself."

There can be no higher example. Not only are the sons of adoption sufferers, but the begotten, the "only begotten Son," the Eternal Heir of glory, in whom all the rest have their title, their sonship and heirship, derived from, and dependent on his; not only all the saints, but the King of saints. Who now shall repine at suffering? Shall the wretched sons of men refuse to suffer, after the suffering of the spotless, glorious Son of God? As St. Bernard speaks of pride, *Ubi se humiliavit Majestas, vermiculus infletur et intumescat*—after Majesty, Highest Majesty, to teach us humility, hath so humbled himself, how wicked and impudent a thing will it be for a worm to swell, to be high conceited! Since thus our Lord hath taught us by suffering in his own person, and hath dignified sufferings so, we should certainly rather be ambitious than afraid of them.

(2.) The greatness and the continuance of his sufferings. That which the apostle speaks here, of "his once suffering," hath its truth; taking in all, "he suffered once;" his whole life was one continued line of suffering, from the manger to the cross. All that lay betwixt was suitable; his state and entertainment throughout his whole life agreed well with so mean a beginning, and so reproachful an end of it. Forced upon a flight, while he could

not go, and living till he appeared in public, in a very mean, despised condition, as the carpenter's son; and, afterwards, his best works paid with envy and revilings; called a "wine-bibber," and "a caster out of devils by the prince of devils;" his life often laid in wait and sought for. Art thou mean in thy birth and life, despised, misjudged, and reviled, on all hands? Look how it was with Him, who had more right than thou hast to better entertainment in the world. Thou wilt not deny it was his own; "it was made by him, and he was in it, and it knew him not." Are thy friends harsh to thee? "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." Hast thou a mean cottage, or art thou drawn from it, and hast no dwelling, and art thou every way poor and ill-accommodated? He was as poor as thou canst be, "and had not where to lay his head," worse provided than the "birds" and "foxes!" But then, consider to what a height his sufferings rose in the end, that most remarkable part of them here meant by his "once suffering for sins." If thou shouldst be cut off by a violent death, or in the prime of thy years, mayest thou not look upon him as going before thee in both these? And in so ignominious a way! Scourged, buffeted, and spit on, he endured all, "He gave his back to the smiters," and then, as the same prophet hath it, "He was numbered amongst the transgressors," Isa. liii. 12. When they had used him with all that shame, they hanged him betwixt two thieves, and they that passed by "wagged their heads," and darted taunts at him, as at a mark fixed to the cross: "they scoffed and said, He saved others, himself he cannot save." "He endured the cross, and despised the shame," says the apostle, Heb. xii. 2.

Thus we see the outside of his sufferings. But the Christian is subject to grievous temptations and sad desertions, which are heavier by far than the sufferings which indeed the apostle speaks of here. Yet even in these, this same argument of his holds. For our Saviour is not unacquainted with, nor ignorant of either of those, though still "without sin." If any of *that* had been in any of his sufferings, it had not furthered, but undone all our comfort in him. But "tempted" he was; he suffered that way too, and the temptations were terrible, as you know. And was there not some strong conflict when he fell down and prayed in the garden, and "sweat drops of blood?" Was there not an awful eclipse, when he cried out on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" So that, even in these, we may apply this comfort, and stay ourselves or our souls on him, and go to him as a compassionate High Priest. "For Christ also suffered," Heb. iv. 15.

2. Consider the fitness of the example. As the same is every way great, yea, *greatest*, so it is fit, the *fittest* to take with a Christian, to set before him, as being so near a pattern, wherein he hath so much interest. As the argument is strong in itself, so, to the new man, the Christian man, it is particularly strongest; it binds him most, as it is not far fetched, but *exemplum domesticum*, "a home pattern;" as when you persuade men to virtue by the example of those that they have a near relation to. They are "his servants," and shall they, or would they think to "be greater than their Master," to be exempt from his lot in the world? They are "his soldiers," and will they refuse to follow him, and to endure with him? "Suffer hardship," says the apostle to

Timothy, "as a good soldier of Jesus Christ," 2 Tim. ii. 3. Will not a word from him put a vigour in them to go after him, whether upon any march or service, when he calls them friends, *commilitiones*, as they tell us was Julius Cæsar's word, which wrought so much on his trained bands? Yea, "he is not ashamed to call them brethren," Heb. ii. 11; and will they be ashamed to share with him, and to be known by their suitable estate, to be his brethren?

3. Consider the efficacy of the example. There is, from these sufferings of Christ, such a result of safety and comfort to a Christian, as makes them a most effectual encouragement to suffering, which is this: if he "suffered once," and that was "for sin," now that heavy, intolerable suffering for sin is once taken out of the believer's way, it makes all other sufferings light, exceeding light, as nothing in his account. "He suffered once for sin," so that to those who lay hold on him this holds sure, that sin is never to be suffered for in the way of strict justice again, as not by him, so not by them who are in him; for "he suffered for sins once," and it was for "their" sins, every poor believer's. So, now the soul, finding itself rid of that fear, goes cheerfully through all other hazards and sufferings.

Whereas the soul, perplexed about that question, finds no relief in all other enjoyments; all propositions of lower comforts are unsavoury and troublesome to it. Tell it of peace and prosperity; say, however the world go, you shall have ease and pleasure, and you shall be honoured and esteemed by all; though you could make a man sure of these, yet if his conscience be working and stirred about the matter of his sin, and the wrath of God which is

tied close to sin, he will wonder at your impertinency, in that you speak so far from the purpose. Say what you will of these, he still asks, What do you mean by this? Those things answer not to me. Do you think I can find comfort in them, so long as my sin is unpardoned, and there is a sentence of eternal death standing above my head? I feel even an impress of somewhat of that hot indignation, some flashes of it flying and lighting upon the face of my soul, and how can I take pleasure in these things you speak of? And though I should be senseless, and feel nothing of this all my life, yet, how soon shall I have done with it, and the delights that reach no further. And then to have everlasting burnings, an eternity of wrath to enter to! How can I be satisfied with that estate?—all you offer a man in this posture, is as if you should set dainty fare, and bring music with it, before a man lying almost pressed to death under great weights, and should bid him eat and be merry, but lift not off his pressure: you do but mock the man, and add to his misery. On the contrary, he that hath got but a view of his Christ, and reads his own pardon in Christ's sufferings, can rejoice in this, in the midst of all other sufferings, and look on death without apprehension, yea, with gladness, for the "sting is out." Christ hath made all pleasant to him by this one thing, that "he suffered once for sins." Christ hath perfumed the cross and the grave, and made all sweet. The pardoned man finds himself light, skips and leaps, and, "through Christ strengthening him," he can encounter any trouble. If you think to shut up his spirit within outward sufferings, he is now, as Samson in his strength, able to carry away on his back the gates

with which you would enclose him. Yea, he can submit patiently to the Lord's hand in any correction: Thou hast forgiven my sin, therefore deal with me as thou wilt; all is well.

Refl. 1. Let us learn to consider more deeply, and to esteem more highly Christ and his sufferings, to silence our grumbling at our petty light crosses; for so they are, in comparison of his. Will not the great odds of his perfect innocency, and of the nature and measure of his sufferings; will not the sense of the redemption of our souls from death by his death; will none of these, nor all of them, argue us into more thankfulness and love to him, and patience in our trials? Why will we then be called Christians? It is impossible to be fretful and malecontent with the Lord's dealing with us in any kind, till first we have forgotten how he dealt with his dearest Son for our sakes. As St. Bernard speaks, *Enimvero non sentient sua, qui illius vulnera intuentur:* "They truly feel not their own wounds, who contemplate his." But these things are not weighed by the most. We hear and speak of them, but our hearts receive not the impressions of them; therefore we repine against our Lord and Father, and drown a hundred great blessings in any little trouble that befalls us.

Refl. 2. Seek surer interest in Christ and his sufferings, than the most either have attained, or are aspiring to; otherwise all that he suffered here will afford thee no ease or comfort in any kind of suffering. No, though thou suffer for a good cause, even for his cause, still this will be an extraneous, foreign thing to thee, and to tell thee of his sufferings, will work no otherwise with thee than some other common story. And as in the day of peace thou

regardest it no more, so, in the day of thy trouble, thou shalt receive no more comfort from it. Other things which you esteemed, shall have no comfort to speak to you: "though you pursue them with words," as Solomon says of the poor man's friends, Prov. xix. 7, "yet they shall be wanting to you." And then you will surely find how happy it were to have this to turn you to, that the Lord Jesus suffered for sins, and for your sins, and therefore hath made it a light and comfortable business to you, to undergo momentary, passing sufferings.

Days of trial will come; do you not see they are on us already? Be persuaded, therefore, to turn your eyes and desires more towards Christ. This is the thing we would still press: the support and happiness of your souls lie on it. But you will not believe it. Oh, that you knew the comforts and sweetness of Christ! Oh, that one would speak, who knew more of them! Were you once but entered into this knowledge of him, and the virtue of his sufferings, you would account all your days but lost wherein you have not known him; and in all times, your hearts would find no refreshment like to the remembrance of his love.

Having somewhat considered these sufferings, as the apostle's argument for his present purpose, we come now,

II. To take a nearer view of the particulars by which he illustrates them, as the main point of our faith and comfort. Of them, here are two things to be remarked, their cause and their kind.

First, Their cause; both their meritorious cause and their final cause; first, what in us procured these sufferings unto Christ, and secondly, what those his sufferings procured unto us. Our guiltiness

brought suffering upon him; and his suffering brings us unto God.

1. For the meritorious cause, what in us brought sufferings on Christ. The evil of sin hath the evil of punishment inseparably connected with it. We are under a natural obligation of obedience unto God, and he justly urges it; so that where the *command* of his law is broken, the *curse* of it presently followeth. And though it was simply in the power of the supreme Lawgiver to have dispensed with the infliction, yet, having in his wisdom purposed to be known a just God in that way, following forth the tenor of his law, of necessity there must be a suffering for sin.

Thus, the angels who kept not their station, falling from it, fell into a dungeon, where they are, "under chains of darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day," Jude 6. Man also fell under the sentence of death, but in this is the difference betwixt man and them: they were not of one, as the parent or common root of the rest, but each one fell or stood for himself alone, so a part of them only perished; but man fell altogether, so that not one of all the race could escape condemnation, unless some other way of satisfaction be found out. And here it is: "Christ suffered for sins, the just for the unjust." "Father," says he, "I have glorified thee on earth," John xvii. 3. In this plan, indeed, do all the Divine attributes shine in their full lustre; infinite mercy, and immense justice, and power, and wisdom. Looking on Christ as ordained for that purpose, "I have found a ransom," says the Father, one fit to redeem man, a kinsman, one of that very same stock, the Son of man, one able to redeem man by satisfying me, and

fulfilling all I lay upon him; "My Son, my only begotten Son, in whom my soul delights." And he is willing, undertakes all, says, "Lo, I come," Psa. xl. 7: we are agreed upon the way of this redemption; yea, upon the persons to be redeemed. It is not a roving blind bargain, a price paid for we know not whom. Hear his own words: "Thou hast given the Son," says the Son to the Father, "power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him; and all mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them," John xvii. 2, 10.

For the sins of these he suffered, standing in their room; and what he did and suffered according to the law of that covenant, was done and suffered by them. All the sins of all the elect were made up into a huge bundle, and bound upon his shoulders. So the prophet speaks in their name: "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows:" and "The Lord laid (or made to meet) on him the iniquity of us all," Isa. liii. 4, 6. He had spoken of many ways of sin, and said, "We have turned every one to his own way;" here he binds up all in the word "iniquity," as all one sin, as if it were that one transgression of the first Adam, which brought on the curse of his seed, borne by the second Adam, to take it away from all that are his seed, who are in him as their root.

He is the great High Priest appearing before God with the names of the elect upon his shoulders, and in his heart bearing them and all their burdens, and offering for them, not any other sacrifice than himself; charging all their sin on himself, as the priest did the sins of the people on the head of the sacrifice. "He, by the eternal Spirit," says the apostle,

"offered up himself without spot unto God, spotless and sinless," Heb. ix. 14, and so he alone is fit to take away our sin, being a satisfactory oblation for it. He suffered: in him was our ransom, and thus it was paid. In the Man, Christ, was the Deity, and so his blood was, as the apostle calls it, "the blood of God," Acts xx. 28; and he being pierced, it came forth, and was told down as the rich price of our redemption. "Not silver, nor gold, nor corruptible things," as our apostle hath it before, "but the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish."

Observe, 1. Shall any man offer to bear the name of a Christian, who pleases himself in the way of sin, and can delight and sport himself with it, when he considers this, that Christ suffered for sin? Do not think it, you who still account sin sweet, which he found so bitter, and account that light, which was so heavy to him, and made his "soul heavy to the death." You are yet far off from him. If you were in him, and one with him, there would be some harmony of your hearts with his, and some sympathy with those sufferings, as endured by your Lord, your Head, and for you. They who, with a right view, see him as pierced by their sins, that sight pierces them, and makes them mourn, brings forth tears, beholding the gushing forth of his blood. This makes the real Christian an avowed enemy to sin. Shall I ever be friends with that, says he, which killed my Lord? No, but I will ever kill it, and do it by applying his death. The true penitent is sworn to be the death of sin: he may be surprised by it, but there is no possibility of reconcilement betwixt them.

Thou that livest kindly and familiarly with sin,

and either openly declarest thyself for it, or hast a secret love for it, where canst thou reap any comfort? Not from these sufferings. To thee, continuing in that posture, it is all one as if Christ had not suffered for sins; yea, it is worse than if no such thing had been, that there is salvation, and terms of mercy offered unto thee, and yet thou perishest; that there is "balm in Gilead," and yet thou art not healed. And if thou hast not comfort from Jesus crucified, I know not whence thou canst have any that will hold out. Look about thee, tell me what thou seest, either in thy possession or in thy hopes, that thou esteemest most, and layest thy confidence on. Or, to deal more liberally with thee, see what estate thou wouldst choose, hadst thou thy wish; stretch thy fancy to devise an earthly happiness. These times are full of unquietness; but give thee a time of the calmest peace, not an air of trouble stirring; put thee where thou wilt, far off from fear of sword and pestilence, and encompass thee with children, friends, and possessions, and honours, and comfort, and health to enjoy all these; yet one thing thou must admit in the midst of them all: within a while thou must die, and having no real portion in Christ, but only a deluding dream of it, thou sinkest through that death into another death far more terrible. Of all thou enjoyest, nothing goes along with thee but unpardoned sin, and that delivers thee up to endless sorrow. "Oh that you were wise, and would consider your latter end!" Do not still gaze about you upon trifles, but yet be entreated to take notice of your Saviour, and receive him, that he may be yours. Fasten your belief and your love on him. Give all your heart to him, who stuck not to give himself an offering for your sins.

Observe, 2. To you who have fled unto him for refuge, if sensible of the church's distress, be upheld with this thought, that he who suffered for it will not suffer it to be undone. All the rage of enemies, yea, "the gates of hell, shall not prevail against it." He may, for a time, suffer the church to be brought low for the sins of his people, and other wise reasons, but he will not utterly forsake it. Though there is much chaff, yet he hath a precious number in these kingdoms, for whom he shed his blood: many God hath called, and many he yet has to call; he will not lose any of his flock which he bought so dear, Acts xx. 28, and for their sake he will, at one time or another, repair our breaches, and establish his throne in these kingdoms. For yourselves, what can affright you while this is in your eye? Let others tremble at the apprehension of sword or pestilence; but, surely, you have for them and all other hazards a most satisfying answer in this: My Christ hath suffered for sin; I am not to fear that; and that set aside, I know the worst is but death—I am wrong; truly that is the best: to be dissolved, and to be with Christ, is [πολλῷ μᾶλλον κρεῖσσον] much more better, Phil. i. 23. "So being justified by faith," believers "have peace with God, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God, glorying even in tribulations," Rom. v. 1—3.

This were a happy estate indeed. But what shall they think who have no assurance, they who doubt that Christ is theirs, and that he suffered for their sins? I know no way but to believe on him, and then you shall know that he is yours. From this arises the grand mistake of many: they would first know that Christ is theirs, and then would believe: which cannot be, because he becomes ours by be-

lieving. It is that which gives title and propriety to him. He is set before sinners as a Saviour who hath suffered for sin, that they may look to him and be saved; that they may lay over their souls on him, and then they may be assured he suffered for them.

Say, then, what is it that scares thee from Christ? This, thou seest, is a poor groundless exception, for he is set before thee as a Saviour to believe on, that so he may be thy Saviour. Why wilt thou not come unto him? Why refusest thou to believe? Art thou a sinner? Art thou unjust? Then, he is fit for thy case: he suffered for sins, "the just for the unjust." Oh! but, so many and so great sins! Yea, is that it? It is true indeed, and good reason thou hast to think so; but, 1. Consider whether they be excepted in the proclamation of Christ, the pardon that comes in his name: if not, if he make no exception, why wilt thou? 2. Consider if thou wilt call them greater than this sacrifice, "He suffered." Take due notice of the greatness and worth, first, of his person, and then, of his sufferings, and thou wilt not dare to say thy sin goes above the value of his suffering, or that thou art too unjust for him to justify thee. Be as unrighteous as thou canst be, art thou convinced of it? then, know that Jesus the just is more righteous than thy unrighteousness. And, after all is said that any sinner hath to say, they are yet, without exception, "blessed who trust in him," Psa. ii. 12.

2. We have the final cause of his sufferings, "That he might bring us to God." It is the chief point of wisdom, to proportion means to their end: therefore, the all-wise God, in putting his only Son to so hard a task, had a high end in this, and this

was it, "that he might bring us unto God." In this we have three things: 1. The nature of this good, nearness unto God. 2. Our deprivement of it, by our own sin. 3. Our restoration to it, by Christ's sufferings.

(1.) The nature of this good. God hath suited every creature he hath made, with a convenient good to which it tends, and in the obtainment of which it rests and is satisfied. Natural bodies have all their own natural place, whither, if not hindered, they move incessantly till they be in it; and they declare, by resting there, that they are, as I may say, where they would be. Sensitive creatures are carried to seek a sensitive good, as agreeable to their rank in being, and, attaining that, aim no further. Now, in this is the excellency of man, that he is made capable of a communion with his Maker, and, because capable of it, is unsatisfied without it: the soul, being cut out, so to speak, to that largeness, cannot be filled with less. Though he is fallen from his right to that good, and from all right desire of it, yet, not from a capacity of it, no, nor from a necessity of it, for the answering and filling of his capacity.

Though the heart once gone from God, turns continually further away from him, and moves not towards him till it be renewed, yet, even in that wandering, it retains that natural relation to God, as its centre, that it hath no true rest elsewhere, nor can by any means find it. It is made for him, and is therefore still restless till it meet with him.

It is true, the natural man takes much pains to quiet his heart by other things, and digests many vexations with hopes of contentment in the end and accomplishment of some design he hath; but still

the heart misgives. Many times he attains not the thing he seeks; but if he do, yet he never attains the satisfaction he seeks and expects in it, but only learns from that to desire something further, and still hunts on after a fancy, drives his own shadow before him, and never overtakes it; and if he did, yet it is but a shadow. And so in running from God, besides the sad end, he carries an interwoven punishment with his sin, the natural disquiet and vexation of his spirit, fluttering to and fro, and "finding no rest for the sole of his foot;" the "waters" of inconstancy and vanity "covering the whole face of the earth."

We study to debase our souls, and to make them content with less than they are made for; yea, we strive to make them carnal, that they may be pleased with sensible things. And in this, men attain a brutish content for a time, forgetting their higher good. But certainly, we cannot think it sufficient, and that no more were to be desired beyond ease and plenty, and pleasures of sense, for then, a beast in good case and a good pasture, might contest with us in point of happiness, and carry it away; for that sensitive good he enjoys without sin, and without the vexation that is mixed with us in all.

These things are too gross and heavy. The soul, the immortal soul, descended from heaven, must either be more happy, or remain miserable. The highest, the uncreated Spirit, is the proper good, "the Father of spirits," that pure and full good which raises the soul above itself; whereas all other things draw it down below itself. So, then, it is never well with the soul, but when it is near unto God, yea, in its union with him, married to him: mismatching itself elsewhere, it hath never any

thing but shame and sorrow. "All that forsake thee shall be ashamed," says the prophet, Jer. xvii. 13; and the psalmist, "They that are far off from thee shall perish," Psa. lxxiii. 27. And this is indeed our natural miserable condition, and it is often expressed this way, by estrangedness and distance from God. See Eph. ii., where the Gentiles are spoken of as "far off" by their profession and nation, but both Jews and Gentiles as far off by their natural foundation, and both are brought near by the blood of the new covenant.

(2.) And this is the second thing here implied, that we are far off by reason of sin; otherwise there were no need of Christ, especially in this way of suffering for sin, to "bring us unto God." At the first, sin, as the breach of God's command, broke off man and separated him from God, and ever since the soul remains naturally remote from God. 1. It lies under a sentence of exile, pronounced by the justice of God; condemned to banishment from God, who is the life and light of the soul, as the soul itself is of the body. 2. It is under a flat impossibility of returning by itself; and that in two respects: first, because of the guiltiness of sin standing betwixt, as an unpassable mountain or wall of separation; secondly, because of the dominion of sin keeping the soul captive, yea, still drawing it farther off from God, increasing the distance and the enmity every day. Nor is there, either in heaven or under heaven, any way to remove this enmity, and make up this distance, and restore man to the possession of God, but this one, by Christ, and by him suffering for sins.

(3.) Our restoration to nearness to God is by Christ's sufferings. He endured the sentence pro-

nounced against man, yea, even in this particular notion of it, as a sentence of exile from God: one main ingredient in his suffering, was that sensible desertion by his heavenly Father, of which he cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And, by suffering the sentence pronounced, he took away the guiltiness of sin, he himself being "spotless and undefiled. For such an High Priest became us," Heb. vii. 26; the more defiled we were, the more did we stand in need of an undefiled priest and sacrifice; and he was both. Therefore the apostle here very fitly mentions this qualification of our Saviour, as necessary for restoring us unto God, "the just for the unjust." So taking on himself, and taking away the guilt of sin, setting his strong shoulder to remove that mountain, he made way or access for man unto God.

This the apostle hath excellently expressed, "He hath reconciled us by his cross, having slain the enmity," Eph. ii. 16; he killed the quarrel betwixt God and us, killed it by his death; brings the parties together, and hath laid a sure foundation of agreement in his own sufferings; appeases his Father's wrath by them, and by the same appeases the sinner's conscience. All that God hath to say, in point of justice, is answered there; all that the poor humbled sinner hath to say, is answered too. He hath offered up such an atonement as satisfies the Father so that he is content that sinners should come in and be reconciled. And then, Christ gives notice of this to the soul, to remove all jealousies. It is full of fear: though it would, it dares not approach unto God, apprehending him to be "a consuming fire." They who have done the offence, are usually the hardest to reconcile, because they are

still in doubt of their pardon. But Christ assures the soul of a full and hearty forgiveness, quenching the flaming wrath of God by his blood. No, says Christ, upon my warrant come in; you will now find my Father otherwise than you imagine: he hath declared himself satisfied at my hands, and is willing to receive you, to be heartily and thoroughly friends; never to hear a word more of the quarrel that was betwixt you; to grant a full oblivion. And if the soul bear back still through distrust, he takes it by the hand, and draws it forward, leads it unto his Father; as the word προσαγάγη imports; presents it to him, and leaves not the matter till it be made a full and sure agreement.

But for this purpose, that the soul may be both able and willing to come unto God, the sufferings of Christ take away that other impediment. As they satisfy the sentence, and thereby remove the guiltiness of sin, so he hath by them purchased a deliverance from the tyrannous power of sin, which detains the soul from God, after all the way has been made for its return. And he hath a power of applying his sufferings to the soul's deliverance, in that kind too. He opens the prison doors to them who are led captive; and because the great chain is upon the heart willingly enthralled in sin, he, by his sovereign power, takes off that, frees the heart from the love of sin, and shows what a base slavish condition it is in, by representing, in his effectual way, the goodness of God, his readiness to entertain a returning sinner, and the sweetness and happiness of communion with him. Thus he powerfully persuades the heart to shake off all, and, without further delay, to return unto God, so as to be received into favour and friendship, and to walk in the way of friendship

with God, to give up itself to his obedience, to disdain the vile service of sin, and live suitably to the dignity of fellowship and union with God.

And there is nothing but the power of Christ alone that is able to effect this, to persuade a sinner to return, to bring home a heart unto God. Common mercies of God, though they have a leading faculty to repentance, Rom. ii. 4, yet the rebellious heart will not be led by them. The judgments of God, public or personal, though they ought to drive us to God, yet the heart, unchanged, runs the further from God. Do we not see it by ourselves and other sinners about us? They look not at all towards him who smites, much less do they return; or if any more serious thoughts of returning arise upon the surprise of an affliction, how soon vanish they, either the stroke abating, or the heart, by time, growing hard and senseless under it! Indeed, when it is renewed and brought in by Christ, then all other things have a sanctified influence, according to their quality, to stir up a Christian to seek after fuller communion, closer walk, and nearer access to God. But leave Christ out, I say, and all other means work not this way: neither the works nor the word of God sounding daily in his ear, "Return, return." Let the noise of the rod speak it too, and both join together to make the cry the louder, "yet the wicked will do wickedly," Dan. xii. 10, will not hearken to the voice of God, will not "see the hand of God lifted up," Isa. xxvi. 11, will not be persuaded to go in and seek peace and reconcilement with God, though declaring himself provoked to punish, and to behave himself as an enemy against his own people. How many are there, who, in their own particular case, have been very sharply lashed with divers scourges

on their bodies, or their families, and yet are never a whit the nearer God for it all! their hearts as proud, and earthly, and vain as ever! and let him lay on ever so much, they will still be the same. Only a Divine virtue, going forth from Christ "lifted up," draws men unto him; and, being come unto him, he brings them unto the Father.

Reflection 1. You who are still strangers to God, who declare yourselves to be so, by living as strangers far off from him, do not still continue to abuse yourselves so grossly. Can you think any consolation yours that arises from the sufferings of Christ, while it is so evident they have not gained their end upon you, have not brought you to God? Truly, most of you seem to think, that our Lord Jesus suffered rather to the end we might neglect God, and disobey him securely, than to restore us to him. Hath he purchased you a liberty to sin? Or is not deliverance from sin, which alone is true liberty, the thing he aimed at, and agreed for, and laid down his life for?

2. Why let we still his blood run in vain as to us? He hath "by it opened up our way to God," and yet we refuse to make use of it! Oh how few come in! Those who are brought unto God, and received into friendship with him, entertain that friendship, they delight in his company, love to be much with him: is it so with us? By being so near, they become like unto him, know his will better every day, and grow more conformable to it. But, alas! in the most, there is nothing of this.

3. But even they who are brought unto God, may be faulty in this, in part, not applying so sweet a privilege. They can comply and be too friendly with the vain world; can pass many days without a

lively communion with God, not aspiring to the increase of that, as the thing our Lord hath purchased for us, and that wherein all our happiness and welfare lie, here and hereafter. Your hearts are cleaving to folly; you are not delighting yourselves in the Lord, not refreshed with this nearness to him, and union with him; your thoughts are not often on it, nor is it your study to walk conformably to it: certainly it ought to be thus, and you should be persuaded to endeavour that it may be thus with you.

4. Remember this for your comfort, that as you are brought unto God by Jesus Christ, so you are kept in that union by him. It is a firmer knot than the first was; there is no power of hell can dissolve it. He suffered once to bring us once unto God, never to depart again. As he suffered once for all, so we are brought once for all. We may be sensibly nearer at one time than at another, but yet we can never be separate or cut off, being once knit by Christ, as the bond of our union. "Neither principalities, nor powers," &c., "shall be able to separate us from the love of God," because it holds "in Christ Jesus our Lord," Rom. viii. 37, 38.

Second: As to the kind of our Lord's sufferings; "Being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." The true life of a Christian is, to eye Christ in every step of his life, both as his rule and as his strength; looking to him as his pattern, both in doing and suffering, and drawing power from him for going through both; for the look of faith doth that, fetches life from Jesus to enable it for all, being without him able for nothing. Therefore the apostle doth still set this before his brethren; and having mentioned Christ's suffering in general, the condition and end of it, he here specifies the particular

kind of it, that which was the utmost point, "put to death in the flesh," and then adds this issue out of it, "quickened by the Spirit."

This is at once the strongest engagement, and the strongest encouragement. Was he, our Head, crowned with thorns, and shall the body look for garlands? Are we redeemed from hell and condemnation by him, and can any such refuse any service he calls them to? They who are "washed in the Lamb's blood, will follow him whithersoever he goes," Rev. xiv. 4, and, following him through, they shall find their journey's end overpay all the troubles and sufferings of the way. "These are they," said the elder who appeared in vision to John, "who came out of great tribulation:" tribulation, and great tribulation—yet they came out of it, and gloriously too, arrayed in "long white robes!" The scarlet strumpet (as follows in that book) dyed her garments red in the blood of the saints; but this is their happiness, that "their garments are washed white in the blood of the Lamb," Rev. vii. 14.

Once take away sin, and all suffering is light. Now, that is done by this, "His once suffering for sin:" those who are in him shall hear no more of that as condemning them, binding them over to suffer that wrath which is due to sin. Now, this puts an invincible strength into the soul for enduring all other things, how hard soever.

"Put to death." This is the utmost point, and that which men are most startled at, to die: and a violent death, "put to death;" and yet, he hath led in this way, who is the "Captain of our salvation." "In the flesh." Under this second phrase, his human nature, and his Divine nature and power, are distinguished. "Put to death in the flesh," is a

very fit expression, not only (as is usual) taking the flesh for the whole manhood, but because death is most properly spoken of that very person, or his flesh. The whole man suffers death, a dissolution, or taking to pieces, and the soul suffers a separation, or dislodging; but death, or the privation of life and sense, belongs particularly to the flesh or body. But the Spirit, here opposed to the flesh or body, is certainly of a higher nature and power than is the human soul, which cannot of itself return to re-inhabit and quicken the body.

"Put to death." His death was both voluntary and violent. That same power which restored his life could have kept it exempted from death; but the design was for death. He therefore took our flesh, to put it off thus, and to offer it up as a sacrifice, which, to be acceptable, must of necessity be free and voluntary; and, in that sense, he is said to have died even by that same Spirit, which here, in opposition to death, is said to quicken him. See Heb. ix. 14, "Through the eternal Spirit, he offered himself without spot unto God." They accounted it an ill-boding sign when the sacrifices came constrainedly to the altar, and drew back, and, on the contrary, were gladdened with the hopes of success, when they came cheerfully forward; but never sacrifice came so willingly all the way, and from the first step knew whither he was going. Yet, because no other sacrifice would serve, he was most content to become one; "Sacrifices and burnt-offerings thou didst not desire: then said I, Lo, I come," Psa. xl. 6, 7. He was not only a willing sacrifice, as Isaac, bound peaceably, and laid on the altar, but his own sacrificer. The beasts, if they came willingly, yet offered not themselves; but he "offered up him-

self;" and thus, not only by a willingness far above all those "sacrifices of bullocks and goats," but "by the eternal Spirit," he offered up himself. Therefore he says, in this regard, "I lay down my life for my sheep;" it is not pulled from me, but I lay it down. And so it is often expressed by [ἀπέθανε] "he died;" and yet, this suits with it, [θανατωθεὶς,] "put to death." Yea, it was also expedient to be thus, that his death should be violent, and so the more penal, to carry the more clear expression of a punishment, and such a violent death as had both ignominy and a curse tied to it, and this inflicted in a judicial way; though, as from the hands of men, most unjustly; that he should stand, and be judged, and condemned to death as a guilty person, carrying in that person the persons of so many who should otherwise have fallen under condemnation, as indeed guilty. "He was numbered with transgressors," (as the prophet hath it,) "bearing the sins of many," Isa. liii. 12.

Thus, then, there was, in his death, external violence joined with internal willingness. But what is there to be found but complications of wonders in our Lord Jesus? Oh! high, inconceivable mystery of godliness! "God manifested in the flesh!" Nothing in this world so strange and sweet as that conjuncture, God Man! *humanitas Dei!* What a strong foundation of friendship and union betwixt the person of man and God, that their natures met in so close embraces in one Person! And, then, look on, and see so poor and despised an outward condition through his life, yet, having hid under it the majesty of God, "all the brightness of the Father's glory!" And this is the top of all, that he was "put to death in the flesh;" the Lord of life dying, the Lord of glory clothed with shame! But

it quickly appeared what kind of Person it was that died, by this, "He was put to death," indeed, "in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit."

"Quickened." He was indeed too great a morsel for the grave to digest. For all its vast craving mouth and devouring appetite, crying, *Sheol*, "Give, give," yet was it forced to give him up again, as the fish to give up the prophet Jonah, who, in that, was the figure of Christ. The chains of that prison are strong, but he was too strong a prisoner to be held by them; as our apostle hath it in his sermon, Acts ii. 24, that it was "not possible that he should be kept by them." They thought all was sure when they had rolled to the stone, and sealed it; that then the grave had indeed shut her mouth upon him; it appeared a done business to them, and looked as if it were very complete in his enemies' eyes, and very desperate to his friends, his poor disciples and followers. Were they not near the point of giving over, when they said, "This is the third day," &c., and, "We trusted this had been he that should have delivered Israel?" Luke xxiv. 21. And yet, he was then with them, who was indeed the deliverer and salvation of Israel. That rolling of the stone to the grave, was as if they had rolled it towards the east in the night, to stop the rising of the sun the next morning; much further above all their watches and their power was this Sun of righteousness in his rising again. That body which was entombed was united to the spring of life, the Divine Spirit of the Godhead that quickened it.

Reflection 1. Thus the church, which is likewise his body, when it seems undone, when it is brought to the lowest posture and state, yet, by virtue of that mystical union with Jesus Christ, as his natural body,

by personal union with his Deity, shall be preserved from destruction, and shall be delivered and raised in due time. Yea, as he was nearest his exaltation in the lowest step of his humiliation, so is it with his church; when things are brought to the most hopeless appearance, then shall light arise out of darkness. *Cum duplicantur lateres venit Moses.*

Therefore, as we ought to seek a more humble sense of Sion's distress, so we should also be solicitous not to let go this hope, that her mighty Lord will, in the end, be glorious in her deliverance, and that all her sufferings and low estate shall be as a dark ground to set off the lustre of her restoration, when the Lord shall visit her with salvation; as in the rising of Jesus Christ, his almighty power and Deity were more manifested than if he had not died. And therefore we may say confidently, with the psalmist to his Lord, "Thou who hast showed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up from the depths of the earth: Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side," Psa. lxxi. 20, 21. Yea, the church comes more beautiful out of the deepest distress: let it be overwhelmed with waves, yet it sinks not, but rises up as only washed. And in this confidence we ought to rejoice, even in the midst of our sorrows; and, though we live not to see them, yet, even in beholding afar off, to be gladdened with the great things the Lord will do for his church in the latter times. He will certainly "make bare his holy arm in the eyes of the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God," Isa. lii. 10. His King whom "he hath set on his holy hill," shall grow in his conquests and glory, and all that rise against him "shall he break with a rod of iron,"

Psa. ii. He was humbled once, but his glory shall be for ever. "As many were astonished at him, his visage being marred more than any man," they shall be as much astonished at his beauty and glory: "So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him," Isa. lii. 14, 15. According as here we find that remarkable evidence of his Divine power in rising from the dead: "Put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit."

Reflection 2. Thus may a believing soul at the lowest, when, to its own sense, it is given over unto death, and swallowed up of it, as it were, "in the belly of hell," yet look up to this Divine power. He whose soul was not left there, will not leave thine there. Yea, when thou art most sunk in thy sad apprehensions, and far off to thy thinking, then is he nearest to raise and comfort thee; as sometimes it grows darkest immediately before day. Rest on his power and goodness, which never failed any who did so. "It is he," as David says, "who lifts up the soul from the gates of death," Psa. ix. 13.

Reflection 3. Would any of you be cured of that common disease, the fear of death? Look this way, and you shall find more than you seek; you shall be taught, not only not to fear, but to love it. Consider, 1. His death: "He died." By that, thou who receivest him as thy life, mayest be sure of this, that thou art, by that his death, freed from the second death. *Descendit huc vita nostra, et tulit mortem nostram, et occidit eam de abundantia vitæ suæ:* "He who is our life," says Augustine, "descended hither, and bore our death, killing it by the abounding of his life." And that is the great point. Let that have the name which was given to the other, "the most terrible of all terrible things;"

and, as the second death is removed, this death which thou art to pass through, is, I may say, beautified and sweetened; the ugly visage of it becomes amiable, when ye look on it in Christ, and in his death: that puts such a pleasing comeliness upon it, that whereas others fly from it with affright, the believer cannot choose but embrace it. He longs to lie down in that bed of rest, since his Lord lay in it, and hath warmed that cold bed, and purified it with his fragrant body. 2. But especially be looking forward to his return thence, "quickened by the Spirit;" this being to those who are in him the certain pledge, yea, the effectual cause of that blessed resurrection which is in their hopes. There is that union betwixt them, that they shall rise by the communication and virtue of his rising; not simply by his power, for so the wicked to their grief shall be raised, but they by his life, as theirs. Therefore it is so often reiterated, John vi., where he speaks of himself as the "living" and "life-giving Bread" to believers; "I will raise them up at the last day." This comfort we have even for the house of clay we lay down; and as for our more considerable part, our immortal souls, this his death and rising hath provided for them, at their dislodging, an entrance into that glory where he is. Now, if these things were lively apprehended and laid hold on, Christ made ours, and the first resurrection manifest in us, were we quickened by his Spirit to newness of life, certainly there would not be a more welcome and refreshing thought, nor a sweeter discourse to us, than that of death. And no matter for the kind of it. Were it a violent death, so was his. Were it what we account most judgment-like amongst diseases, the plague—Was not his death very painful?

And was it not an accursed death? And by that curse endured by him in his, is not the curse taken away to the believer? Oh how welcome will that day be, that day of deliverance! To be out of this woeful prison, I regard not at what door I go out, being at once freed from so many deaths, and let in to enjoy Him who is my life.

Ver. 19. By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;
20. Which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.
21. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us, (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

There is nothing that so much concerns a Christian to know, as the excellency of Jesus Christ, his person and works; so that it is always pertinent to insist much on that subject. The apostle, having spoken of this Spirit or Divine nature, and the power of it, as raising him from the dead, takes occasion to speak of another work of that Spirit, namely, the emission and publishing of his Divine doctrine; and that, not as a new thing following his death and rising, but as the same in substance with that which was, by the same Spirit, promulgated long before, even to the first inhabitants of the world. "Quickened by the Spirit," that is, in our days, says the apostle; but then, long before that, by the same Spirit, "He went and preached to the spirits in prison."

This place is somewhat obscure in itself, but, as it usually happens, made more so by the various

fancies and contests of interpreters, aiming or pretending to clear it. These I like never to make a noise of. They who dream of the descent of Christ's soul into hell, think this place sounds somewhat that way; but, being examined, it proves no way suitable, nor can, by the strongest wresting, be drawn to fit their purpose. For, 1. That it was to preach, he went thither, they are not willing to avow; though the end they assign is as groundless and imaginary as this is. 2. They would have his business to be with the spirits of the faithful deceased before his coming; but here we see it is with the disobedient. And, 3. His Spirit here is the same with the sense of the foregoing words, which mean not his soul, but his eternal Deity. 4. Nor is it "the spirits that were in prison," as they read it, but "the spirits in prison," which by the opposition of their former condition, "sometime," or "formerly disobedient," doth clearly speak their present condition, as the just consequence and fruit of their disobedience.

Other misinterpretations I mention not, taking it as agreeable to the whole strain of the apostle's words,* that Jesus Christ did, before his appearing

* Thus I then thought, but do now apprehend another sense, as probable, if not more, even that so much rejected by most interpreters: the mission of the Spirit, and preaching of the gospel by it, after his resurrection, preaching to sinners, and converting them, according to the prophecy which he first fulfilled in person, and after, more amply, in his apostles. That prophecy I mean, Isa. lxi. 1. The Spirit came upon him, and it was sent from him on his apostles, to preach to "spirits in prison: to preach liberty to those captives," captive spirits, and therefore called "spirits in prison," to illustrate the thing the more, by opposition to that spirit of Christ, "the spirit of liberty," setting them free. And this is to show the greater efficacy of Christ's preaching than of Noah's; though he was a signal preacher of righteousness, yet only himself and his

in the flesh, speak by his Spirit in his servants to those of the foregoing ages, yea, the most ancient of them, declaring to them the way of life, though rejected by the unbelief of the most part. This is interjected in the mentioning of Christ's sufferings and exaltation after them. And, after all, the apostle returns to that again, and to the exhortation which he strengthens by it: but so as that this discourse taken in, is pertinently adapted to the present subject. The apostle's aim in it we may conceive to be this, (his main scope being to encourage his brethren in the faith of Christ, and the way of holiness, against all opposition and hardship,) so to instruct his brethren in Christ's perpetual influence into his church in all ages, even before his incarnation, as that they might, at the same time, see the great unbelief of the world, yea, their opposing of Divine truth, and the small number of those who receive it, and so not be discouraged by the fewness of their number, and the hatred of the world, finding that salvation in Jesus Christ, dead and risen again, which the rest miss of by their own wilful refusal. And this very point he insists on clearly in the following chapter, ver. 3, 4. And the very ways of ungodliness there specified, which believers renounce, were those that the world was guilty of in those days, and in which they were surprised by the flood: "they ate and drank till the flood came upon them."

In the words of these three verses, we have three

family, eight persons, were saved by him; but multitudes of all nations by the spirit and preaching of Christ in the gospel; and that by the seal of baptism, the resurrection of Christ being represented in the return from the water, and our dying with him, by immersion; and that figure of baptism is like their ark.

things: First, An assertion concerning the preaching of Christ, and the persons he preached to. Second, The designation and description of the time or age wherein that was, and the particular way of God's dealing with them. Third, The adapting or applying of the example to Christians.—First, The assertion concerning the preaching of Christ, and the persons he preached to, in these words, which I take together; "By the which Spirit he went and preached to the spirits in prison, which sometime were disobedient."

In these words we have a preacher and his hearers. With regard to the Preacher, we shall find here, 1. His ability. 2. His activity in the use of it.

1. His ability is altogether singular and matchless, the very spring of all abilities, the Spirit of Wisdom himself, being the co-eternal Son of God. That Spirit he preached by, was the same as that by which he raised himself from the dead; and without this Spirit there is no preaching. Now he was, as our apostle calls him, "a Preacher of righteousness," but it was by the power of this Spirit; for in him did this Spirit preach. The Son is the wisdom of the Father, his name is the Word; not only for that by him "all things were created," as John hath it, John i. 3, the Son being that power by which, as by the word of his mouth, all things were made; but he is "the Word," likewise, "as revealing the Father," declaring to us the counsel and will of God: therefore he is, by the same evangelist, in the same place, called that "light which illuminates the world," John i. 9, without which, man, called the lesser world, the intellectual world, were as the greater world without the sun. And all who bring aright the doctrine of saving wisdom, derive it

necessarily from him; all preachers draw from this sovereign Preacher, as the fountain of Divine light, As all the planets receive their light from the sun, and by that diffusing itself amongst them, it is not diminished in the sun, but only communicated to them, remaining still full and entire in it as its source; thus doth the Spirit flow from Christ, in a particular degree, unto those he sends forth in his name, and it is in them that he preaches by the power and light of his eternal Spirit.

Hither, then, must all those come who would be rightly supplied and enabled for that work. It is impossible to speak duly of him in any measure, but by his Spirit; there must be particular access, and a receiving of instructions from him, and a transfusion of his Spirit into ours. Oh! were it thus with us, how sweet were it to speak of him! To be much in prayer, much in dependence on him, and drawing from him, would do much more in this, than reading and studying, seeking after arts, and tongues, and common knowledge. These, indeed, are not to be despised nor neglected. *Utilis lectio, utilis eruditio, sed magis unctio necessaria, quippe quæ sola docet de omnibus*, says Bernard: "Reading is good, and learning good, but above all, anointing is necessary, that anointing that teacheth all things." And you who are for your own interest, be earnest with this Lord, this Fountain of Spirit, to let forth more of it upon his messengers in these times. You would receive back the fruit of it, were ye busy this way; you would find more life and refreshing sweetness in the word of life, how weak and worthless soever they were who brought it; it should descend as sweet showers upon the valleys, and make them fruitful.

2. We have the activity of Christ as a Preacher. By this Spirit, it is said here, "he preached." Not only did he so in the days of his abode on earth, but in all times, both before and after. He never left his church altogether destitute of saving light, which he dispensed himself, and conveyed by the hands of his servants; therefore it is said, "he preached," that this may be no excuse for times after he is ascended into heaven, no, nor for times before he descended to the earth in human flesh. Though he preached not then, nor does now in his flesh, yet "by his Spirit" he then preached, and still doth; so that according to what was chief in him, he was still present with his church, and preaching in it, and is so to the end of the world, this his infinite Spirit being every where. Yet, it is said here, by which "he went and preached," signifying the remarkable clearness of his administration that way. As when he appears eminently in any work of his own, or in taking notice of our works, God is said to come down; (as in reference to those cities of Babel and Sodom, "Let us go down," and, "I will go down and see," Gen. xi. 5, 7; xviii. 21: so Exod. iii. 8, "I am come down to deliver Israel;") thus here, so clearly did he admonish them by Noah, coming, as it were, himself, on purpose to declare his mind to them. And this word, I conceive, is the rather used to show what equality there is in this. He came, indeed, visibly, and dwelt amongst men, when he became flesh; yet, before that he visited them by his Spirit; he went by that, and preached. And so, in after-times, himself being ascended, and not having come visibly in his flesh to all, but to the Jews only, yet, in the preaching of the apostles to the Gentiles, as the great apostle says of him in

that expression, Eph. ii. 17, "He came and preached to you which were afar off." And this he continues to do in the ministry of his word; and therefore, says he, "He that despiseth you, despiseth me," Luke x. 16.

Were this considered, it could not but procure far more respect to the word, and more acceptance of it. Would you think that, in his word, Christ speaks by his eternal Spirit, yea, that he comes and preaches, addresses himself particularly to you in it; could you slight him thus, and turn him off with daily refusals, or delays at least? Think, it is too long you have so unworthily used so great a Lord, who brings unto you so great salvation; who came once in so wonderful a way to work that salvation for us in his flesh, and is still coming to offer it unto us by his Spirit; who does himself preach to us, telling us what he undertook on our behalf, and how he hath performed all, and that now nothing rests but that we receive him, and believe on him, and all is ours. But, alas! from the most the return is, what we have here, disobedience.

"Which sometime were disobedient." There are two things in these hearers, by which they are characterized; their present condition in the time the apostle was speaking of them, "spirits in prison," and their former disposition, when the Spirit of Christ was preaching to them, "sometime disobedient." This latter went first in time, and was the cause of the other; therefore, of it first.

1. "Sometime disobedient." If you look to their visible subordinate preacher, you find he was a holy man, and an able and diligent preacher of righteousness, both in his doctrine, and in the track of his life, which is the most powerful preaching; on both

which accounts, it seems strange that he prevailed so little. But it appears much more so, if we look higher, even to this height at which the apostle points, that almighty "Spirit of Christ" who preached to them. And yet, they were disobedient! The word is, (ἀπειθήσασι,) "they were not persuaded;" it signifies both unbelief and disobedience, and that very fitly, unbelief being in itself the grand disobedience: it is the mind's not yielding to Divine truth, and so the spring of all disobedience in affection and action. And this "root of bitterness," this unbelief, is deeply fastened in our natural hearts; and without a change in them, a taking them to pieces, they cannot be good. It is as a tree firmly rooted, which cannot be plucked up without loosening the ground round about it. And this accursed root brings forth fruit unto death, because the word is not believed, neither the threats of the law, nor the promises of the gospel; therefore men cleave unto their sins, and speak peace unto themselves while they are under the curse.

It may seem very strange that the gospel is so fruitless amongst us; yea, that neither word nor rod, both preaching aloud to us the doctrine of humiliation and repentance, persuades any man to return, or so much as to turn inward, and question himself, to say, What have I done? But thus it will be, till the Spirit be poured from on high, to open and soften hearts. This is to be desired, as much wanting in the ministry of the word; but were it there, that would not serve, unless it were by a concurrent work within the heart meeting the word, and making the impressions of it there: for here we find the Spirit went and preached; and yet, the spirits of the hearers still remained unbelieving and

disobedient. It is therefore a combined work of this Spirit in the preacher and the hearers, that makes it successful, otherwise it is but shouting in a dead man's ear; there must be *something within*, as one said in the like case.

2. "To the spirits in prison." That is now their posture; and because he speaks of them as in that posture, he calls them spirits; for it is their spirits that are in that prison. He likewise calls them spirits to whom the Spirit of Christ preached, because it is indeed that which the preaching of the word aims at; it hath to do with the spirits of men. It is not content to be at their ear with a sound, but works on their minds and spirits some way, either to believe and receive, or to be hardened and sealed up to judgment by it, which is for rebels. If disobedience follow on the preaching of that word, the prison follows on that disobedience; and that word, by which they would not be bound to obedience, binds them over to that prison, whence they shall never escape, nor be released for ever.

Take notice of it, and know that you are warned—you will not receive salvation, offering, pressing itself upon you. You are every day in that way of disobedience, hastening to this perpetual imprisonment.

Consider, you now sit and hear this word; so did those who are here spoken of; they had their time on earth, and much patience was used towards them. And though you are not to be swept away by a flood of waters, yet you are daily carried on by the flood of time and mortality, Psa. xc. 5. And how soon you shall be on the other side, and sent into eternity, you know not. I beseech you, be yet wise; hearken to the offers yet made you; for in

his name I yet once again make a tender of Jesus Christ, and salvation in him, to all that will let go their sins, to lay hold on him. Oh! do not destroy yourselves. You are in prison; he proclaims unto you liberty. Christ is still following us himself with treaties. *Clamans dictis, factis, morte, vitâ, descensu, ascensu, clamans ut redeamus ad eum*, Augustine: "Crying aloud by his words, by his deeds, by his death, by his life, by his coming down from heaven, by his ascension into it, crying to us to return to him." Christ proclaims your liberty, and will you not accept of it? Think, though you are pleased with your present thraldom and prison, it reserves you (if you come not forth) to this other prison, that shall not please you: these chains of spiritual darkness in which you are, unless you be freed, will deliver you up to the "chains of everlasting darkness," wherein these hopeless prisoners are "kept to the judgment of the great day." But if you will receive Jesus Christ, presently upon that, life, and liberty, and blessedness are made yours. "If the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed," John viii. 36.

"When once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah." There are two main continuing wonders in the world, the bounty of God, and the disloyalty of man; and the succession of times is nothing but new editions of these two. One grand example is here set before us, an œcumenical example, as large as the whole world; on the part of God, much patience, and yet, on man's part, invincible disobedience. Here are two things in the instance. 1. The Lord's general dealing with the world of the ungodly at that time. 2. His peculiar

way with his own chosen, Noah and his family: he waited patiently for all the rest, but he effectually saved them.

Observe, first, the time designated thus, "In the days of Noah." There were many great and powerful persons in those days, who overtopped Noah (no doubt) in outward respects; as in their stature, the proud giants. And they begot children, "mighty men of old, men of renown," as the text hath it, Gen. vi. 4, and yet, as themselves perished in the flood, so their names are drowned. They had their big thoughts, certainly, that their houses and their names should continue, as the psalmist speaks, Psa. xlix. 11, and yet they are sunk in perpetual oblivion; while Noah's name, who walked in humble obedience, you see in these most precious records of God's own book, still looks fresh, and smells sweet, and hath this honour, that the very age of the world is marked with this name, to be known by it: "in the days of Noah." That which profane ambitious persons do idolatrously seek after, they are often remarkably disappointed of. They would have their names memorable and famous, yet they rot; they are either buried with them, or remembered with disgrace, rotting above ground, as carcasses uninterred, and so are the more noisome; it being as little credit to them to be mentioned, as for Pilate that his name is in the Confession of Faith. But the name and remembrance of the righteous is still sweet and delightful; as the name of Abraham the father of the faithful, and those of Isaac and Jacob: their names are embalmed indeed, so that they cannot rot, embalmed with God's own name (Eternal), THAT name being wrapped about theirs, "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

Thus is Noah here mentioned as preferred of God; and so, in the Second Epistle, as "a preacher of righteousness," and Heb. xi., among those worthies whose honour is, that "they believed." This is only a name, a small thing, not to be mentioned in comparison of their other privileges, and especially of that venerable life and glory which they are heirs to; and indeed it is a thing they regard very little; yet, this we see, that even this advantage follows them, and flies from the vain and ungodly, who haunt and pursue it.

The Lord's dealing with the wicked in those times, before he swept them away by the deluge, is represented in these two particulars: 1. Long-suffering, and withal, 2. Clear warning.

1. Long-suffering—long forbearing to be angry, as the Hebrew word is in the proclamation of the Divine name, Exod. xxxiv. 6, which supposes a great provocation, and the continuance of it, and yet, patience continuing. And in this appears the goodness of God: considering how hateful sin is to him, and how powerful he is to punish it, how easy were it, if it pleased him, in one moment to cut off all the ungodly, high and low, throughout the whole world! Yet he bears, and forbears to punish! Oh! what a world of sin is every day committed in nations, in cities, and villages, yea, in families, which he doth not strike with present judgments, and not only forbears to punish, but multiplies his common mercies on them; "sun, and rain, and fruitful seasons," Acts xiv. 17.

Yea, there is so much of this, that it falls under a gross misconstruction; yet, he bears that too. "Because sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed, therefore the heart of the sons of

men is fully set in them to do evil," Eccles. viii. 11. Because there is not so much as a word of it for the time, (so the word is,) this swells and fills the heart of man, and makes it "big to do evil." And not only is the Lord's long-suffering mistaken by the ungodly, but even by his own, who should understand him better, and know the true sense of his ways, yet sometimes they are misled in this point: beholding his forbearance of punishing the workers of iniquity, instead of magnifying his patience, they fall very near into questioning his justice and providence; see Psa. xiii.; Jer. ii.; Job x., &c. Our narrow, hasty spirits, left to their own measures, take not in those larger views that would satisfy us in respect to the ways of God, and forget the immense largeness of his wise designs, his deep reach from one age to another, yea, from eternity to eternity. We consider not, 1. How easily he can right himself, in point of justice, when he will; that none can make escape from him, how loose soever their guard seem, and how great liberty soever appears in their present condition. *Nemo decoquit huic creditori.* 2. That as he can most easily, so he will most seasonably be known in executing judgment; and that his justice shall shine the brighter, by all that patience he hath used, by the sun of prosperity. 3. We think not now how little that time is to him, which seems long to us, to whom "a thousand years are as one day." It seemed a long time of the church's distress and their enemies' triumph, in those seventy years of the Babylonish captivity; and yet, in God's language, it is spoken of as "a moment, a small moment," Isa. liv. 7. However, in the issue, the Lord always clears himself. He is indeed long-suffering and patient, but the impenitent

abusers of his patience pay interest for all the time of that forbearance, in the weight of judgment when it comes upon them. But thus, we see, the Lord deals. Thus he dealt with the world in the beginning, "when all flesh had corrupted their way; yet," saith he, "their days shall be one hundred and twenty years," Gen. vi. 3.

Let us learn to curb and cool our brisk humours towards even stubborn sinners. Be grieved at their sin, for that is your duty; but think it not strange, nor fret at it, that they continue to abuse the long-suffering of God, and yet, that he continues ever abused by suffering them. Zeal is good, but as it springs from love, if it be right, so it is requited by love, and carries the impressions of it: of love to God, and so, a complacency in his way, liking it because it is his; and of love to men, so as to be pleased with that waiting for them, in the possibility, at least, of their being reclaimed; knowing that, however, if they return not, yet the Lord will not lose his own at their hands. "Wilt thou," said those two fiery disciples, "that we call for fire, as Elias?" Oh! but the spirit of the dove rested on Him who told them "they knew not what spirit they were of," Luke ix. 55, which denotes—You speak of Elias, and you think you are of his spirit in this motion, but you mistake yourselves; this comes from another spirit than you imagine. Instead of looking for such sudden justice without you, look inward, and see whence that is: examine and correct that within you.

When you are tempted to take ill that goodness and patience of God to sinners, consider, 1. Can this be right, to differ from his mind in any thing? Is it not our only wisdom and ever safe rule, to think

as he thinks, and will as he wills? And I pray you, does he not hate sin more than you do? Is not his interest in punishing it deeper than yours? And if you be zealous for his interest, as you pretend, then be so with him, and in his way; for starting from that, surely you are wrong. Consider, 2. Did he not wait for thee? What had become of thee, if long-suffering had not subserved his purpose of further mercy, of free pardon to thee? And why wilt thou not always allow that to which thou art so much obliged? Wouldst thou have the bridge cut, because thou art so over? Surely thou wilt not own so gross a thought. Therefore, esteem thy God still the more, as thou seest the more of his long-suffering to sinners; and learn for him, and with him, to bear and wait.

2. But this was not a dumb forbearance, such as may serve for a surprise, but continual teaching and warning were joined with it, as remarked before. We see, they wanted not preaching of the choicest kind. He, the "Son of God," by his eternal "Spirit, went and preached to them;" it was his truth in Noah's mouth. And with that, we have a continued real sermon, expressed in this verse, "while the ark was preparing:" that spoke God's mind, and every knock, as the usual observation is, of the hammers and tools used in building, preached to them, threatening aloud designed judgment, and exhorting to prevent it. And therefore that word is added, ἐξεδέχετο, that the long-suffering of God "waited," or expected; expected a believing of his word, and a returning from their wickedness. But we see no such thing followed; they took their own course still, and therefore the Lord took his. They had polluted the earth with their wickedness; now

the Lord would have the cleansing by repentance; that being denied, it must be another way, by a flood. And because they and their sins remained one, they would not part with them, therefore was one work made of both; they and their sins, as inseparable, must be cleansed away together.

Thus impenitence under much long-suffering, makes judgment full and complete. I appeal to you, hath not the Lord used much forbearance towards us? Hath he not patiently spared us, and clearly warned us, and waited long for the fruit of all? Hath any thing been wanting? Have not temporal mercies been multiplied on us? Have not the spiritual riches of the gospel been opened up to us?

And each of you, for yourselves, consider how it is with you after so much long-suffering of God, which none of you can deny he hath used towards you, and so many gracious invitations, with that patience. Have they gained your hearts, or do you still remain servants to sin, still strangers to him, and formal worshippers? I beseech you, think on it, what will be the issue of that course. Is it a light matter to you, "to die in your sins," and to have "the wrath of God abiding on you?" to have refused Christ so often, and that after you have been so often requested to receive salvation? After the Lord hath followed you with entreaties, hath called to you so often, "Why will ye die?" yet, wilfully to perish, and withal to have all these entreaties come in and accuse you, and make your burden heavier? Would you willingly die in this state? If not, then think that yet he is waiting, if at length you will return. This one day more of his waiting you have, and of his speaking to you; and some

who were here with you the last day, are taken away since. "Oh that we were wise, and would consider our latter end!" Though there were neither sword nor pestilence near you, you must die, and, for any thing you know, quickly. Why wear you out the day of grace and those precious seasons still, as uncertain of Christ, yea, as undiligent after him as you were long ago? As you love your souls, be more serious in their business. This was the undoing of the sinners we are speaking of; they were all for present things. "They ate and drank, they married," in a continued course, without ceasing, and without minding their after estate, Luke xvii. 27. They were drowned in these things, and that drowned them in a flood. Noah did also eat and drink, but his main work was, during that time, the preparing of the ark. The necessities of this life the children of God are tied to, and forced to bestow some time and pains on them; but the thing that takes up their hearts, that which the bent of their souls is set on, is their interest in Jesus Christ: and all your wise designs are but a pleasing madness, till this be chief with you. Others have had as much of God's patience, and as fair opportunity, as you, whose souls and Christ had never met, and now know that they never shall. They had their time of worldly projects and enjoyment, as you now have, and followed them, as if they had been immortally to abide with them; but they are passed away as a shadow, and we are posting after them, and within a while shall lie down in the dust. Oh! how happy they whose hearts are not here, trading with vanity and gathering vexation, but whose thoughts are on that blessed life above trouble! Certainly, those who pass for fools in the world, are the only "children of wisdom,"

those who have renounced their lusts and their own wills, have yielded up themselves to Jesus, taking him for their King, and have their minds resting on him as their salvation.

"While the ark was a preparing." Observe, The delay of the Lord's determined judgment on the ungodly, was indeed long-suffering towards them, but here was more in it to Noah and his family; the providing for their preservation, and, till that was completed for them, the rest were spared. Thus, the very forbearance which the ungodly do enjoy, is usually involved with the interest of the godly; something of that usually goes into it; and so it is in a great part for their sakes, that the rest are both spared and furnished with common mercies. The saints are usually the scorn and contempt of others, yet are they, by that love the Lord carries towards them, the very arches and pillars of states, and kingdoms, and families, where they are, yea, of the world, [*Semen sanctum statumen terræ,*] the frame whereof is continued mainly in regard to them, Isa. vi. 13. But they who are ungrateful to the great Maker and Upholder of it, and regardless of him, what wonder if they take no notice of the advantage they receive by the concernment of his children in the world? Observe here,

I. The work. II. The end of it. I. In the work, the preparing of the ark, observe, 1. God's appointment; 2. Noah's obedience.

1. It was God's appointment. His power was not tied to this, yet his wisdom chose it. He who steered the course of this ark safely all that time, could have preserved those he designed it for without it; but thus it pleases the Lord, usually, to mix his most wonderful deliverances with some selected

means; exercising, in that way, our obedience in their use, yet so as that the singular power of his hand in them, whereon faith rests, doth clearly appear, doing by them what, in a more natural way, they could not possibly effect.

2. For the obedience of Noah, if we should insist on the difficulties, both in this work and in the way of their preservation by it, it would look the clearer, and be found very remarkable. Considering the length of the work, the great pains in providing materials, especially considering the opposition that probably he met with in it from the profane about him, the mightier of them, or, at least, the hatred and continual scoffs of all sorts, it required principles of an invincible resolution to go through with it. What (would they say) means this old dotard to do? Whither this monstrous voyage? And inasmuch as it spoke, as no doubt he told them, their ruin and his safety, this would incense them so much the more. You look far before you, and what! shall we all perish, and you alone escape? But through all, the sovereign command and gracious promise of his God carried him, regarding their scoffs and threats as little in making the ark, as he did afterwards the noise of the waters about it, when he was sitting safe within it. This his obedience, having indeed such boisterous winds to encounter, had need of a well-fastened root, that it might stand and hold out against them all, and so it had. The apostle St. Paul tells us what the root of it was: "By faith, being warned of God, he prepared an ark," Heb. xi. 7. And there is no living and lasting obedience but what springs from that root. He believed what the Lord spake of his determined judgment on the ungodly world, and from

the belief of that arose that holy fear which is expressly mentioned, Heb. xi. 7, as exciting him to this work; and he believed the word of promise, which the Lord spake concerning his preservation by the ark: and the belief of these two carried him strongly on to the work, and through it, against all counter-blasts and opposition; overcame both his own doubtings and the mockings of the wicked, while he still looked to Him who was the master and contriver of the work.

Till we attain such a fixed view of our God, and such firm persuasion of his truth, and power, and goodness, it will never be right with us; there will be nothing but wavering and unsettledness in our spirits and in our ways. Every little discouragement from within or from without, that meets us, will be likely to turn us over. We shall not walk in an even course, but still be reeling and staggering, till faith be set wholly upon its own basis, the proper foundation of it: not set betwixt two upon one strong prop, and another that is rotten, partly on God, and partly on creature helps and encouragements, or our own strength. Our only safe and happy way is, in humble obedience, in his own strength to follow his appointments, without standing and questioning the matter, and to resign the conduct of all to his wisdom and love; to put the rudder of our life into his hand, to steer the course of it as seemeth him good, resting quietly on his word of promise for our safety. Lord, whither thou wilt, and which way thou wilt, be thou my guide; and it sufficeth.

This absolute following of God, and trusting him with all, is marked as the true character of faith in Abraham; his going after God away from his

country, "not knowing," nor asking "whither he went," secure in his guide. And so, in that other greater point of offering his son, he silenced all disputes about it, by that mighty conclusion of faith, "accounting that he was able to raise him from the dead," Heb. xi. 8, 19. Thus it is said, ver. 7, "By faith Noah prepared the ark." He did not argue and question, How shall this be done? and if it were, how shall I get all the kinds of beasts gathered together to put into it? and how shall it be ended, when we are shut in? No, but he believed firmly that it should be finished by him, and he be saved by it; and he was not disappointed.

II. The end of this work was the "saving of" Noah and his family from the general deluge, wherein all the rest perished.

Here it will be fit to consider the point of the preservation of the godly in ordinary and common calamities, briefly in these positions.

1. It is certain that the children of God, as they are not exempted from the common, universal calamities and evils of this life, which befall the rest of men, so not from any particular kind of them. As it is "appointed" for them, with all others, "once to die," so we find them not privileged from any kind of disease, or other way of death; not from falling by sword, or by pestilence, or in the frenzy of a fever, or any kind of sudden death: yea, when these, or such like, are on a land by way of public judgment, the godly are not altogether exempted from them, but may fall in them with others; as we find Moses dying in the wilderness with those he brought out of Egypt. Now though it was for a particular failing in the wilderness; yet it evinces, that there is in this no infringement upon their privileges,

nothing contrary to the love of God towards them, and his covenant with them.

2. The promises made to the godly of preservation from common judgments, have their truth, and are made good in many of them who are so preserved, though they do not hold absolutely and universally. For they are ever to be understood in subordination to their highest good; but when they are preserved, they ought to take it as a gracious accomplishment even of these promises to them, which the wicked, many of whom do likewise escape, have no right to, but are preserved for after judgment.

3. It is certain, that the curse and sting is taken out of all those evils incident to the godly with others, in life and death, which makes the main difference, though to the eye of the world invisible. And it may be observed, that in those common judgments of sword, or pestilence, or other epidemic diseases, a great part of those who are cut off are of the most wicked, though the Lord may send of those arrows to some few of his own, to call them home.

The full and clear distinction of the godly and the wicked, being reserved for their after-estate in eternity, it needs not seem strange, that in many things it appears not here. One thing, above all others most grievous to the child of God, may take away the wonder of other things they suffer in common, that is, the remainders of sin in them while they are in the flesh: though there is a spirit in them above it, and contrary to it, which makes the difference, yet, sometimes the too much likeness, especially in the prevailings of corruption, doth confuse the matter, not only to others' eyes, but to their own.

4. Though the great distinction and severing be

reserved to that great and solemn day which shall clear all, yet the Lord is pleased, in part, more remarkably at some times to distinguish his own from the ungodly, in the execution of temporal judgments, and to give these as preludes of that final and full judgment. And this instance of Noah was one of the most eminent in that kind, being the most general judgment that ever befell the world, or that shall befall it till the last, and so, the liveliest figure of it; this was by water, as the second shall be by fire. It was most congruous that it should resemble it in this, as the chief point; the saving of righteous Noah and his family from it, prefiguring the eternal salvation of believers, as our apostle teacheth.

"Wherein few, that is, eight persons, were saved by water." This great point of the fewness of those who are saved in the other greater salvation, as in this, I shall not now prosecute: only,

1. If so few, then, the inquiry into ourselves, whether we be of these few, should be more diligent, and followed more home, than it is as yet with the most of us. We are wary in our trifles, and only in this easily deceived, yea, our own deceivers in this great point. Is not this folly far beyond what you usually say of some, "Penny wise and pound foolish;" to be wise for a moment, and fools for eternity?

2. You who are indeed seeking the way of life, be not discouraged by your fewness. It hath always been so. You see here, how few of the whole world were saved. And is it not better to be of the few in the ark, than of the multitude in the waters? Let them fret, as ordinarily they do, to see so few more diligent for heaven; as no doubt they did in the case of Noah. And this is what galls them, that any

should have higher names and surer hopes this way: What! are none but such as you going to heaven? Think you all of us damned? What can we say, but that there is a flood of wrath awaiting many, and certainly, all that are out of the ark shall perish in it.

3. This is that main truth which I would leave with you: look on Jesus Christ as the ark, of whom this was a figure, and believe it, out of him there is nothing but certain destruction, a deluge of wrath, all the world over, on those who are out of Christ. Oh! it is our life, our only safety to be in him. But these things are not believed. Men think they believe them, and do not. Were it believed, that we are under the sentence of eternal death in our natural state, and that there is no escape but by removing out of ourselves into Christ, oh, what thronging would there be to him! Whereas, now, he invites, and calls, and how few are persuaded to come to him! Noah believed the Lord's word of judgment against the world, believed his promise made to him, and prepared an ark. Is it not a high sign of unbelief, that, there being an ark of everlasting salvation ready prepared to our hand, we will not so much as come to it? Will you be persuaded certainly, that the ark door stands open? His offers are free; do but come, and try if he will turn you away. No, he will not: "Him that comes to me, I will in no wise cast out," John vi. 37. And as there is such acceptance and sure preservation in him, there is as sure perishing without him, trust on what you will. Be you of a giant's stature, as many of them were, to help you to climb up, as they would surely do when the flood came on, to the highest mountains and tallest trees, yet, it shall overtake you. Make

your best of your worldly advantages, or good parts, or civil righteousness, all shall prove poor shifts from the flood of wrath, which rises above all these, and drowns them. Only the ark of our salvation is safe. Think how gladly they would have been within the ark, when they found death without it; and now it was too late! How would many who now despise Christ, wish to honour him one day! Men, so long as they thought to be safe on the earth, would never betake them to the ark, would think it a prison; and could men find salvation any where else, they would never come to Christ for it: this is, because they know him not. But yet, be it necessity, let that drive thee in; and then being in him, thou shalt find reason to love him for himself, besides the salvation thou hast in him.

You who have fled into him for refuge, wrong him not so far as to question your safety. What though the floods of thy former guiltiness rise high, thine ark shall still be above them; and the higher they rise, the higher he shall rise, shall have the more glory in freely justifying and saving thee. Though thou find the remaining power of sin still within thee, yet it shall not sink thine ark. There was in this ark, sin, yet they were saved from the flood. If thou dost believe, that puts thee in Christ, and he will bring thee safe through without splitting or sinking.

As thou art bound to account thyself safe in him, so to admire that love which set thee there. Noah was a holy man: but whence were both his holiness and his preservation while the world perished, but because "he found favour," or free grace, as the word is, in the eyes of the Lord? And no doubt, he did much contemplate this, being secure within, when

the cries of the rest drowning were about him. Thus think thou: Seeing so few are saved in this blessed ark wherein I am, in comparison of the multitudes that perish in the deluge, whence is this? why was I chosen, and so many about me left, why, but because it pleased him? But all is strait here. We have neither hearts nor time for ample thoughts of this love, till we be beyond time; then shall we admire and praise without ceasing, and without wearying.

Third, As the example the apostle here makes use of is great and remarkable, so it is fit and suitable for the instruction of Christians, to whom he proceeds to adapt and apply it, in the particular resemblance of it to the rule of Christianity. "The like figure whereunto, even baptism, doth also now save us."

In these words we have, I. The end of baptism. II. The proper virtue or efficacy of it for that end. And, III. A resemblance in both these to Noah's preservation in the flood.

I. The end of baptism, to "save us." This is the great common end of all the ordinances of God; that one high mark they all aim at. And the great and common mistake in regard to them, is, that they are not so understood and used. We come and sit awhile, and, if we can keep awake, give the word the hearing; but how few of us receive it as "the ingrafted word that is able to save our souls!" Were it thus taken, what sweetness would be found in it, which most who hear and read it are strangers to! How precious would those lines be, if we looked on them thus, and saw them meeting and concentring in salvation as their end! Thus, likewise, were the sacraments considered indeed as seals of this inherit-

ance, annexed to the great charter of it, seals of salvation, this would powerfully beget a fit appetite for the Lord's supper, when we are invited to it, and would beget a due esteem of baptism; would teach you more frequent and fruitful thoughts of your own baptism, and more pious considerations of it when you require it for your children. A natural eye looks upon bread, and wine, and water, and sees the outward difference of their use there, that they are set apart and differenced, as is evident by external circumstances, from their common use; but the main of the difference, wherein their excellency lies, it sees not, as the eye of faith above that espies salvation under them. And oh, what a different thing are they to it, from what they are to a formal user of them! We should aspire to know the hidden rich things of God that are wrapped up in his ordinances. We stick in the shell and surface of them, and seek no further; that makes them unbeautiful and unsavoury to us, and that use of them turns into an empty custom. Let us be more earnest with him who hath appointed them, and made this their end, "to save us," that he would clear up the eye of our souls, to see them thus under this relation, and to see how they are suited to this their end, and tend to it. And let us seriously seek salvation in them, from his own hand, and we shall find it.

"Doth save us." So that this salvation of Noah and his family from the deluge, and all outward deliverances and salvations, are but dark shadows of this. Let them not be spoken of, these reprisals and prolongings of this present life, in comparison of the deliverance of the soul from death, the second death; the stretching of a moment, compared to the concernment of eternity. How would any of you

welcome a full and sure protection from common dangers, if such were to be had, that you should be ascertained of safety from sword and pestilence; that whatever others suffered about you, you and your family should be free! And those who have escaped a near danger of this kind, are apt to rest there, as if no more were to be feared; whereas this common favour may be shown to those who are far off from God. And what though you be not only thus far safe, but I say, if you were secured for the future, which none of you absolutely are, yet, when you are put out of danger of sword and plague, still death remains, and sin and wrath may be remaining with it. And shall it not be all one, to die under these in a time of public peace and welfare, as if it were now? Yea, it may be something more unhappy, by reason of the increase of the heap of sin and wrath, guiltiness being augmented by life prolonged; and more grievous to be pulled away from the world in the midst of peaceable enjoyment, and to have everlasting darkness succeed to that short sunshine of thy day of ease; happiness of a short date, and misery for ever! What availed it wicked Ham, to outlive the flood, to inherit a curse after it; to be kept undrowned in the waters, to see himself and his posterity blasted with his father's curse? Think seriously, what will be the end of all thy temporary safety and preservation, if thou share not in this salvation, and find not thyself sealed and marked for it? What will it avail, to flatter thyself with a dream of happiness, and "walk in the light" of a few "sparks" that will soon die out, and "then lie down in sorrow?" Isa. l. 11. A sad bed that, which the most have to go to, after they have wearied themselves all the day, all their life, in a chase of vanity!

II. The next thing is, the power and virtue of this means for its end. That baptism hath a power, is clear, in that it is so expressly said, "it doth save us:" what kind of power, is equally clear from the way it is here expressed; not by a natural force of the element; though adapted and sacramentally used, it only can wash away the filth of the body; its physical efficacy or power reaches no further: but it is in the hand of the Spirit of God, as other sacraments are, and as the word itself is, to purify the conscience, and convey grace and salvation to the soul, by the reference it hath to, and union with that which it represents. It saves "by the answer of a good conscience unto God," and it affords that, "by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead."

Thus, then, we have a true account of the power of this, and so of other sacraments, and a discovery of the error of two extremes: 1. Of those who ascribe too much to them, as if they wrought by a natural inherent virtue, and carried grace in them inseparably. 2. Of those who ascribe too little to them, making them only signs and badges of our profession. Signs they are, but more than signs merely representing; they are means exhibiting, and seals confirming grace to the faithful. But the working of faith, and the conveying of Christ into the soul to be received by faith, is not a thing put into them to do of themselves, but still in the Supreme Hand that appointed them: and he indeed both causes the souls of his own to receive these his seals with faith, and makes them effectual to confirm that faith which receives them so. They are then, in a word, neither empty signs to those who believe, nor effectual causes of grace to those who believe not.

The mistake, on both sides, arises from the want of duly considering the relative nature of these seals, and that kind of union that is betwixt them and the grace they represent, which is real, though not natural or physical, as they speak, so that, though they do not save all who partake of them, yet they do really and effectually save believers, (for whose salvation they are means,) as the other external ordinances of God do. Though they have not that power which is peculiar to the Author of them, yet a power they have, such as befits their nature, and by reason of which they are truly said to sanctify and justify, and so to save, as the apostle here avers of baptism.

Now, that which is intended for our help, our carnal minds are ready to turn into a hinderance and disadvantage. The Lord representing invisible things to the eye, and confirming his promises even by visible seals, we are apt from the grossness of our unspiritual hearts, instead of stepping up by that which is earthly, to the Divine spiritual things represented, to stay in the outward element, and go no further. Therefore, the apostle, to lead us into the inside of this seal of baptism, is very clear in designating the effect and fruit of it: "Not," says he, "the putting away the filth of the flesh:" (and water, if you look no further, can do no more:) there is an invisible impurity upon our nature, chiefly on our invisible part, our soul: this washing means the taking away of that, and where it reaches its true effect, it doth so purify the conscience, and makes it good, truly so, in the sight of God, who is the Judge of it.

Consider, 1. It is a pitiful thing to see the ignorance of the most, professing Christianity, and

partaking of the outward seals of it, yet not knowing what they mean; not apprehending the spiritual dignity and virtue of them. Blind in the "mysteries of the kingdom," they are not so much as sensible of that blindness. And being ignorant of the nature of these holy things, they cannot have a due esteem of them, which arises out of the view of their inward worth and efficacy. A confused fancy they have of some good in them, and this rising to the other extreme, to a superstitious confidence in the simple performance and participation of them, as if that carried some inseparable virtue with it, which none could miss of, who are sprinkled with the waters of baptism, and share in the elements of bread and wine in the Lord's supper.

And what is the utmost plea of the most for their title to heaven, but that in these relative and external things they are Christians; but they are baptized, hear the word, and are admitted to the Lord's table: not considering how many have gone through all these, who yet, daily, are going on in the ways of death, never coming near Jesus Christ, "who is the way, and the truth, and the life," whom the word, and the seals of it, hold forth to believers. And they are washed in his blood, and quickened with his life, and made like him, and co-heirs of glory with him.

2. Even those who have some clearer notion of the nature and fruit of the seals of grace, yet are in a practical error, in that they look not with due diligence into themselves, inquiring after the efficiency of them in their hearts; do not study the life of Christ, to know more what it is, and then, to search into themselves for the truth and the growth of that life within them. Is it not an unbecoming

thing for a Christian (when he is about to appear before the Lord at his table, and so looks something more narrowly within) to find as little faith, as little Divine affection, a heart as unmortified to the world, as cold towards Christ, as before his last address to the same table, after the intervening, possibly, of many months; in which time, had he been careful often to reflect inwards on his heart, and to look back upon that new sealing in his last participation, he might probably have been more conformable? And, truly, as there is much guiltiness cleaves to us in this, so, generally, much more in reference to this other sacrament that is here the apostle's subject, baptism, which being but once administered, and that in infancy, is very seldom and slightly considered by many, even real Christians. And so we are at a loss in that profit and comfort, that increase of both holiness and faith, which the frequent recollecting of it, after a spiritual manner, would no doubt advance us to. And not only do we neglect to put ourselves upon the thoughts of it in private, but, in the frequent opportunities of such thoughts in public, we let it pass unregarded, are idle, inconsiderate, and so, truly, guilty be holders. And the more frequently we have these opportunities, the less are we touched with them; they become common, and work not, and the slighting of them grows as common with us as the thing. Yea, when the engagement is more special and personal, when parents are to present their infants to this ordinance, (and then might, and certainly ought to have a more particular and fixed eye upon it, and themselves as being sealed with it, to ask within after the fruit and power of it, and to stir up themselves anew to the actings of faith, and

to ambition after newness of life, and, with earnest prayer for their children, to be suitors for themselves, for further evidence of their interest in Christ,) yet, possibly, many are not much engaged in these things even at such times, but are more busied to prepare their house for entertaining their friends, than to prepare their hearts for offering up their infant unto God to be sealed, and withal to make a new offer of their own hearts to him, to have renewed on them the inward seal of the covenant of grace, the outward seal whereof they did receive, as it is now to be conferred upon their infant.

Did we often look upon the face of our souls, the beholding of the many spots with which we have defiled them after our washing, might work us to shame and grief, and would drive us by renewed application to wash often in that blood which that water figures, which alone can fetch out the stain of sin; and then, it would put us upon renewed purposes of purity, to walk more carefully, to avoid the pollutions of the world we walk in, and to purge out the pollutions of the hearts that we carry about with us, which defile us more than all the world besides. It would work a holy disdain of sin, often to contemplate ourselves as washed in so precious a laver. Shall I, would the Christian say, considering that I am now cleansed in the precious blood of my Lord Jesus, run again into that puddle out of which he so graciously took me, and made me clean? Let the swine wallow in it: he hath made me of his sheepfold. He hath made me of that excellent order for which all are consecrated by that washing, who partake of it: "He hath washed us in his blood, and made us kings and priests unto God the Father." Am I of these, and shall I

debase myself to the vile pleasures of sin? No, I will think myself too good to serve any sinful lusts: seeing that he hath looked on me, and taken me up, and washed and dignified me, and that I am wholly his, all my study and business shall be, to honour and magnify him.

"The answer of a good conscience," &c. The taking away of spiritual filthiness, as the true and saving effect of baptism, the apostle here expresses by that which is the further result and effect of it, "The answer of a good conscience unto God;" for it is the washing away of that filthiness which both makes the conscience good, and, in making it such, fits it to make answer unto God. A good conscience, in its full sense, is a pure conscience, and a peaceable conscience; and it cannot, indeed, be peaceably good, unless it be purely good. And although, on the other side, it may want the present enjoyment of peace, being purified, yet, certainly, in a purified conscience, there is a title and right to peace; it is radically there, even when it appears not; and, in due time, it shall appear, shall spring forth, bud, and flourish.

The purified and good condition of the whole soul may well, as here it doth, go under the name of the good conscience, it being so prime a faculty of it, and as the glass of the whole soul, wherein the state of it is represented. Therefore, Heb. ix. 14, the efficacy of the blood of Christ is expressed thus, that it "purifieth our consciences from dead works;" which expression is the same thing in effect with that here, "the answer of a good conscience unto God."

"The answer," (ἐπερώτημα,) the asking or questioning of conscience, which comprises likewise its

answer; for the word intends the whole correspondence of the conscience with God, and with itself as towards God, or in the sight of God. And indeed, God's questioning it, is by itself; it is his deputy in the soul. He makes it pose itself, for him, and before him, concerning its own condition; and so, the answer it gives itself in that posture, he as it were sitting and hearing it in his presence, is an answer made unto him. This questioning and answering (if such a thing were at this time, as it was certainly soon after) yet means not the questions and answers used in the baptism of persons who, being of years, professed their faith in answering the questions moved; it possibly alludes unto that; but it further, by way of resemblance, expresses the inward questioning and answering which is transacted within, betwixt the soul and itself, and the soul and God, and so is allusively called ἐπερώτημα, "a questioning and answering," but it is distinctively specified, εις Θεὸν; whereas the other was towards men, this is unto God.

A good conscience is a waking, speaking conscience, and the conscience that questions itself most, is of all sorts the best; that which is dumb, therefore, or asleep, and is not active and frequent in self-inquiries, is not a good conscience. The word is judicial, ἐπερώτημα, alluding to the *interrogation* used in law for the trial and executing of processes. And this is the great business of conscience, to sit, and examine, and judge within; to *hold courts* in the soul. And it is of continual necessity that it be so: there can be no vacation of this judicature, without great damage to the state of the soul: yea, not a day ought to pass without a session of con-

science within ; for daily disorders arise in the soul, which, if they pass on, will grow and gather more, and so breed more difficulty in their trial and redress. Yet men do easily turn from this work as hard and unpleasant, and make many a long vacation in the year, and protract it from one day to another. In the morning they must go about their business, and at night they are weary and sleepy, and all the day long one affair steps in after another ; and in case of that failing, some trifling company or other ; and so their days pass on, while the soul is overgrown with impurities and disorders.

You know what confusions, and disorders, and evils will abound amongst a rude people, where there is no kind of court or judicature held. Thus is it with that unruly rabble, the lusts and passions of our souls, when there is no discipline nor judgment within, or where there is but a neglect and intermission of it for a short time. And the most part of souls are in the posture of ruin : their vile affections, as a headstrong, tumultuous multitude, that will not suffer a deputed judge to sit amongst them, cry down their consciences, and make a continual noise, that the voice of it may not be heard, and so, force it to desist and leave them to their own ways.

But you who take this course, know, you are providing the severest judgment for yourselves by this disturbing of judgment, as when a people rise against an inferior judge, the prince or supreme magistrate who sent him, hearing of it, doth not fail to vindicate his honour and justice in their exemplary punishment.

Will you not answer unto conscience, but, when it begins to speak, turn to business or company, that you may not hear it ? Know, that it and you must

answer unto God; and when he shall make inquiry, it must report, and report as the truth is, knowing that there is no hiding the matter from him: Lord, there are, to my knowledge, a world of enormities within the circuit I had to judge, and I would have judged them, but was forcibly withstood and interrupted; and was not strong enough to resist the tumultuous power that rose against me; now the matter comes into thine own hand to judge it thyself. What shall the soul say in that day, when conscience shall make such an answer unto God, and it shall come under the severity of his justice for all? Whereas, if it had given way to the conscience to find out, and judge, and rectify matters, so that it could have answered concerning its procedure that way, God would accept this as the answer of a good conscience, and what conscience hath done, he would not do over again: it hath judged; then I acquit. "For if we would judge ourselves," says the apostle, "we should not be judged," 1 Cor. xi. 31.

This questioning or inquiry of conscience, and so, its report or answer unto God, extends to all the affairs of the soul, all the affections and motions of it, and all the actions and carriage of the whole man. The open wickedness of the most, testifies against them, that though sprinkled with water in baptism, yet they are strangers to the power and gracious efficacy of it. Not being "baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire," they have still their dross and filth remaining in them, and nothing else appearing in their ways; so that their consciences cannot so much as make a good answer for them unto men, much less unto God. What shall it answer for them, being judged, but that they are swearers, and cursers, and drunkards, or unclean?

or that they are slanderers, delighting to pass their hours in descanting on the actions and ways of others, and looking through the miscoloured glass of their own malice and pride; that they are neglecters of God and holy things, lovers of themselves and their own pleasures, more than lovers of God? And have such as these impudence enough to call themselves Christians, and to pretend themselves to be such as are washed in the blood of Christ? Yes, they do this. But be ashamed and confounded in yourselves, you that remain in this condition. Yea, although thou art blameless in men's eyes, and possibly in thy own eyes too, yet thou mayest be filthy still in the sight of God. There is such a generation, a multitude of them, "that are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness," Prov. xxx. 12; moral evil persons who are most satisfied with their own state, or such as have further "a form of godliness," but their lusts are not mortified by "the power of it," secret pride, and earthliness of mind, and vain-glory, and carnal wisdom, being still entertained with pleasure within.

These are foul pollutions, filthy and hateful in the sight of God; so that where it is thus, that such guests are in peaceable possession of the heart, there the blood and Spirit of Christ are not yet come; neither can there be this answer of a good conscience unto God.

This "answer of a good conscience unto God," as likewise its questioning, to enable itself for that answer, is touching two great points, which are of chief concern to the soul, its justification, and its sanctification; for baptism is the seal of both, and purifies the conscience in both respects. *That*

water is the figure both of the blood and the water, the justifying blood of Christ, and the pure water of the sanctifying Spirit of Christ: he takes away the condemning guiltiness of sin by the one, and the polluting filthiness by the other.

Now, the conscience of a real believer inquiring within, upon right discovery will make this answer unto God: Lord, I have found that there is no standing before thee, for the soul in itself is overwhelmed with a world of guiltiness: but I find a blood sprinkled upon it, that hath, I am sure, virtue enough to purge it all away, and to present it pure unto thee; and I know that wheresoever thou findest that blood sprinkled, thine anger is quenched and appeased immediately upon the sight of it. Thine hand cannot smite where that blood is before thine eye. And this the Lord does agree to, and authorizes the conscience, upon this account, to return back an answer of safety and peace to the soul.

So for the other point: Lord, I find a living work of holiness on this soul: though there is yet corruption there, yet it is as a continual grief and vexation, it is an implacable hatred, there is no peace betwixt them, but continual enmity and hostility; and if I cannot say much of the high degrees of grace, and faith in Christ, and love to him, and heavenliness of mind, yet, I may say, there is a beginning of these: at least, this I most confidently affirm, that there are real and earnest desires of the soul after these things. It would know and conform to thy will, and be delivered from itself and its own will; and though it were to the highest displeasure of all the world, it would gladly walk in all well-pleasing unto thee. Now, he who sees the truth of these things, knowing it to be thus,

owns it as his own work, and engages himself to advance it, and bring it to perfection. This is a taste of that intercourse which the purified conscience hath with God, as the saving fruit of baptism.

And all this it doth, not of itself, but by virtue of "the resurrection of Jesus Christ," which refers both to the remote effect, "salvation," and to the nearer effect, as a means and pledge of that, "the purifying of the conscience."

By this his death, and the effusion of his blood in his sufferings, are not excluded, but are included in it, his resurrection being the evidence of that whole work of expiation, both completed and accepted: full payment being made by our Surety, and so he set free, his freedom is the cause and the assurance of ours. Therefore the apostle St. Paul expresses it so, that "he died for our sins, and rose for our righteousness;" and our apostle shows us the worth of our "living hope" in this same resurrection, chap. i. ver. 3. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

Now, that baptism doth apply and seal to the believer his interest in the death and resurrection of Christ, the apostle St. Paul teaches to the full, Rom. vi. 4. "We are buried with him," says he, "by baptism into his death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we should also walk in newness of life:" the dipping into the waters representing our dying with Christ; and the return thence, our rising with him.

The last thing is, the resemblance of baptism, in these things, to the saving of Noah in the flood. And it holds in that we spoke of last; for he seemed to have rather entered into a grave, as dead, than into a safeguard of life, in going into the ark; yet, being buried there, he rose again, as it were, in his coming forth to begin a new world. The waters of the flood drowned the ungodly, as a heap of filthiness, washed them away, them and their sin together as one, being inseparable; and upon the same waters, the ark floating, preserved Noah. Thus, the waters of baptism are intended as a deluge to drown sin and to save the believer, who by faith is separated both from the world and from his sin; so, it sinks, and he is saved.

And there is, further, another thing specified by the apostle, wherein, though it be a little hard, yet he chiefly intends the parallel; the fewness of those that are saved by both. For though many are sprinkled with the elemental water of baptism, yet few so as to attain by it the "answer of a good conscience towards God," and to live by a participation of the resurrection and life of Christ.

Thou that seest the world perishing in a deluge of wrath, and art now most thoughtful for this, how thou shalt escape it, fly into Christ as thy safety, and rest secure there. Thou shalt find life in his death, and that life further ascertained to thee in his rising again. So full and clear a title to life hast thou in these two, that thou canst challenge all adversaries upon this very ground, as unconquerable whilst thou standest on it, and mayest speak thy challenge in the apostle's style, "It is God that justifieth, who shall condemn?" But how know you that he justifies? "It is Christ that died, yea,

rather that is risen, who sitteth at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us," Rom. viii. 33, 34. It alludes to that place, Isa. l. 8, where Christ speaks of himself, but in the name of all who adhere to him; "He is near that justifies me: who is he that will contend with me?" So that what Christ speaks there, the apostle, with good reason, imparts to each believer as in him. If no more is to be laid to Christ's charge, he being now acquitted, as is clear by his rising again; then, neither to thine, who art clothed with him, and one with him.

This is the grand answer of a good conscience; and, in point of justifying them before God, there can be no answer but this. What have any to say to thee? Thy debt is paid by him who undertook it; and he is free. Answer all accusations with this, "Christ is risen."

And then, for the mortifying of sin, and strengthening of thy graces, look daily on that death and resurrection. Study them, set thine eye upon them, till thy heart take on the impression of them by much spiritual and affectionate looking on them. "Beholding the glory of thy Lord" Christ, then, be "transformed into it," 2 Cor. iii. 18. It is not only a moral pattern or copy, but an effectual cause of thy sanctification, having real influence into thy soul. Dead with him, and again alive with him! Oh, happiness and dignity unspeakable, to have this life known and cleared to your souls! If it were, how would it make you live above the world, and all the vain hopes and fears of this wretched life, and the fear of death itself! Yea, it would make that visage of death most lovely, which to the world is most affrightful.

It is the apostle's maxim, that the "carnal mind is enmity against God;" and as it is universally true of every carnal mind, so of all the motions and thoughts of it. Even where it seems to agree with God, yet it is still contrary; if it acknowledge and conform to his ordinance, yet, even in so doing, it is on directly opposite terms to him, particularly in this, that what he esteems most in them, the carnal mind makes least account of. He chiefly eyes and values the inside; the natural man dwells and rests in the shell and surface of them. God, according to his spiritual nature, looks most on the more spiritual part of his worship and worshippers; the carnal mind is in this just like itself, altogether for the sensible, external part, and unable to look beyond it. Therefore the apostle here, having taken occasion to speak of baptism in terms that contain a parallel and resemblance between it and the flood, is express in correcting this mistake. It is not, says he, "the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience."

Were it possible to persuade you, I would recommend one thing to you: learn to look on the ordinances of God suitably to their nature, spiritually; and inquire after the spiritual effect and working of them upon your consciences. We would willingly have all religion reduced to externals; this is our natural choice; and we would pay all in this coin, as cheaper and easier by far, and would compound for the spiritual part, rather to add and give more external performance and ceremony. Hence, the natural complacency in Popery, which is all for this service of the flesh and body-services; and to those prescribed by God, will deal so liberally with him in that kind, as to add

more, and frame new devices and rites—what you will in this kind, sprinklings, and washings, and anointings, and incense. But whither tends all this? Is it not a gross mistaking of God, to think him thus pleased? Or is it not a direct affront, knowing that he is not pleased with these, but desires another thing, to thrust that upon him which he cares not for, and refuse him what he calls for?—that single, humble heart-worship and walking with him, that purity of spirit and conscience which only he prizes; no outward service being acceptable, but for these, as they tend to this end, and do attain it. Give me, saith he, nothing, if you give not this. Oh! saith the carnal mind, any thing but this thou shalt have; as many washings and offerings as thou wilt, "thousands of rams, and ten thousand rivers of oil;" yea, rather than fail, "let the fruit of my body go for the sin of my soul," Mic. vi. 6. Thus we: will the outward use of the word and sacraments do it? then, all shall be well: baptized we are. And shall I hear much and communicate often, if I can reach it? Shall I be exact in point of family-worship? Shall I pray in secret? All this I do, or at least I now promise. Ay, but when all that is done, there is yet one thing may be wanting, and if it be so, all that amounts to nothing. Is thy conscience purified and made good by all these; or art thou seeking and aiming at this, by the use of all means? Then certainly thou shalt find life in them. But does thy heart still remain uncleansed from the old ways, not purified from the pollutions of the world? Do thy beloved sins still lodge with thee, and keep possession of thy heart? Then art thou still a stranger to Christ, and an enemy to God. The word and seals of life

are dead to thee, and thou art still dead in the use of them all. Know you not that many have made shipwreck upon the very rock of salvation? that many who were baptized as well as you, and as constant attendants on all the worship and ordinances of God as you, yet have remained without Christ, and died in their sins, and are now past recovery? Oh that you would be warned! There are still multitudes running headlong that same course, tending to destruction, through the midst of all the means of salvation—the saddest way of all to it, through word and sacraments, and all heavenly ordinances, to be walking hellwards! Christians, and yet no Christians; baptized, and yet unbaptized! As the prophet takes in the profane multitude of God's own people with the nations, Jer. ix. 26, "Egypt, and Judah, and Edom; all these nations are uncircumcised;" and the worst came last; "and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart;" thus, thus, the most of us are unbaptized in the heart. And as this is the way of personal destruction, so it is that, as the prophet there declares, which brings upon the church so many public judgments; and as the apostle tells the Corinthians, 1 Cor. xi. 30, that for the abuse of the Lord's table, "many were sick, and many slept." Certainly, our abuse of the holy things of God, and want of their proper spiritual fruits, are amongst the prime sins of this land, for which so many slain have fallen in the fields by the sword, and in the streets by pestilence; and more are likely yet to fall, if we thus continue to provoke the Lord to his face. For, it is the most avowed, direct affront, to profane his holy things; and this we do while we answer not their proper end, and are not inwardly sanctified by them.

We have no other word, nor other sacraments, to recommend to you, than those which you have used so long to no purpose; only we would call you from the dead forms, to seek the living power of them, that you perish not.

You think the renouncing of baptism a horrible word, and that we would speak so only of witches; yet it is a common guiltiness that cleaves to all who renounce not the filthy lusts and the self-will of their own hearts. For baptism carries in it a renouncing of these; and so, the cleaving unto these is a renouncing of it. Oh! we all were sealed for God in baptism; but who lives as if it was so? How few have the impression of it on the conscience, and the expression of it in the walk and fruit of their life! We do not, as clean-washed persons, abhor and fly all pollutions, "all fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness."

We have been a long time hearers of the gospel, whereof baptism is the seal, and most of us often at the Lord's table. What hath all this done upon us? Ask within: Are your hearts changed? Is there a new creation there? Where is that spiritual-mindedness? Are your hearts dead to the world and sin, and alive to God? "your consciences purged from dead works?"

What mean you? Is not this the end of all the ordinances, to make all clean, and to renew and make good the conscience, to bring the soul and your Lord into a happy amity, and a good correspondence, that it may not only be on speaking terms, but often speak and converse with him?—may have liberty both to demand and answer, as the original word implies? that it may speak the language of faith and humble obedience unto God, and that he

may speak the language of peace to it, and both, the language of the Lord each to the other?

That conscience alone is good, which is much busied in this work, in demanding and answering; which speaks much with itself, and much with God. This is both the sign that it is good, and the means to make it better. That soul will doubtless be very wary in its walk, which takes daily account of itself, and renders up that account unto God. It will not live by guess, but naturally examine each step beforehand, because it is resolved to examine all after; will consider well what it should do, because it means to ask over again what it hath done, and not only to answer itself, but to make a faithful report of all unto God; to lay all before him continually, upon trial made; to tell him what is in any measure well done, as his own work, and bless him for that; and tell him, too, all the slips and miscarriages of the day, as our own; complaining of ourselves in his presence, and still entreating free pardon, and more wisdom to walk more holily and exactly, and gaining, even by our failings, more humility and more watchfulness.

If you would have your consciences answer well, they must inquire and question much beforehand. Whether is this I purpose and go about agreeable to my Lord's will? Will it please him? Ask that more, and regard that more than this, which the most follow. Will it please or profit myself? Fits that my own humour? And examine not only the bulk and substance of thy ways and actions, but the manner of them, how thy heart is set. So think it not enough to go to church, or to pray, but "take heed how ye hear;" consider how pure He is, and how piercing his eye, whom thou servest.

Then, again, afterwards; think it not enough, I was praying, or hearing, or reading, it was a good work, what need I question it further? No, but be still reflecting and asking how it was done: How have I heard, how have I prayed? Was my heart humbled by the discoveries of sin, from the world? Was it refreshed with the promises of grace? Did it lie level under the word, to receive the stamp of it? Was it in prayer set and kept in a holy bent towards God? Did it breathe forth real and earnest desires into his ear; or was it remiss, and roving, and dead in the service? So in my society with others, in such and such company, what was spent of my time, and how did I employ it? Did I seek to honour my Lord, and to edify my brethren, by my carriage and speeches; or did the time run out in trifling, vain discourse? When alone, what is the carriage and walk of my heart? Where it hath most liberty to move in its own pace, is it delighted in converse with God? Are the thoughts of heavenly things frequent and sweet to it; or does it run after the earth and the delights of it, spinning out itself in impertinent vain contrivances?

The neglect of such inquiries, is that which entertains and increases the impurity of the soul, so that men are afraid to look into themselves, and to look up to God. But oh! what a foolish course is this, to shift off what cannot be avoided! In the end, answer must be made to that all-seeing Judge with whom we have to do, and to whom we owe our accounts.

And, truly, it should be seriously considered, what makes this good conscience, which makes an acceptable answer unto God. That appears by the opposition, "not the putting away the filth of the flesh?"

then, it *is* the putting away of *soul-filthiness;* so it is the renewing and purifying of the conscience, that makes it good, pure, and peaceable. In the purifying, it may be troubled, which is but the stirring in cleansing of it, and makes more quiet in the end, as physic, or the lancing of a sore; and after it is in some measure cleansed, it may have fits of trouble, which yet still add further purity and further peace. So there is no hazard in that work; but all the misery is, a dead security of the conscience while remaining filthy, and yet unstirred; or, after some stirring or pricking, as a wound not thoroughly cured, skinned over, which will but breed more vexation in the end; it will fester and grow more difficult to be cured, and if it be cured, it must be by deeper cutting and more pain, than if at first it had endured a thorough search.

O, my brethren! take heed of sleeping unto death in carnal ease. Resolve to take no rest till you be in the element and place of soul-rest, where solid rest indeed is. Rest not till you be with Christ. Though all the world should offer their best, turn them by with disdain; if they will not be turned by, throw them down, and go over them, and trample upon them. Say you have no rest to give me, nor will I take any at your hands, nor from any creature. There is no rest for me till I be under his shadow, who endured so much trouble to purchase my rest, and whom having found, I may sit down quiet and satisfied; and when the men of the world make boast of the highest content, I will outvie them all with this one word, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His."

"The answer of a good conscience toward God." The conscience of man is never rightly at peace in

itself, till it be rightly persuaded of peace with God, which, while it remains filthy, it cannot be; for he is holy, and iniquity cannot dwell with him. What communion betwixt light and darkness? 2 Cor. vi. 14. So then the conscience must be cleansed, ere it can look upon God with assurance and peace. This cleansing is sacramentally performed by baptism; effectually, by the Spirit of Christ and the blood of Christ; and he lives to impart both: therefore here is mentioned his resurrection from the dead, as that, by virtue whereof we are assured of this purifying and peace. Then can the conscience, in some measure with confidence, answer, Lord, though polluted by former sins, and by sin still dwelling in me, yet thou seest that my desires are to be daily more like my Saviour; I would have more love and zeal for thee, more hatred of sin. It can answer with St. Peter, when he was posed by the question, "Lovest thou me?" Lord, I appeal to thine own eye, who seest my heart: "Lord, thou knowest that I love thee;" at least I desire to love thee, and to desire thee; and that is love. Willingly would I do thee more suitable service, and honour thy name more; and I do sincerely desire more grace for this, that thou mayest have more glory; and I entreat the light of thy countenance for this end, that, by seeing it, my heart may be more weaned from the world, and knit unto thyself. Thus it answers touching its inward frame and the work of holiness by the spirit of holiness dwelling in it. But, to answer justice, touching the point of guilt, it flies "to the blood of sprinkling," fetches all its answer thence, turns over the matter upon it, and that blood answers for it; for it doth speak, and "speaketh better things than the blood of Abel," Heb. xii. 24, speaks

full payment of all that can be exacted from the sinner; and that is a sufficient answer.

The conscience is then, in this point, at first made speechless, driven to a nonplus in itself, hath from itself no answer to make; but then it turns about to Christ, and finds what to say: Lord, there is indeed in me nothing but guiltiness; I have deserved death; but I have fled into the city of refuge which thou hast appointed; there I resolve to abide, to live and die there. If justice pursue me, it shall find me there: I take sanctuary in Jesus. The arrest laid upon me, will light upon him, and he hath wherewithal to answer it. He can straightway declare he hath paid all, and can make it good. He hath the acquittance to show; yea, his own liberty is a real sign of it. He was in prison, and is let free, which tells that all is satisfied. Therefore the answer here rises out of the "resurrection of Jesus Christ."

And in this very thing lies our peace, and our way, and all our happiness. Oh! it is worth your time and pains to try your interest in this; it is the only thing worthy your highest diligence. But the most are out of their wits, running like a number of distracted persons, and still in a deal of business, but to what end they know not. You are unwilling to be deceived in those things which, at their best and surest, do but deceive you when all is done; but are content to be deceived in that which is your great concernment. You are your own deceivers in it; gladly gulled with shadows of faith and repentance, false touches of sorrow, and false flashes of joy, and are not careful to have your souls really unbottomed from themselves, and built upon Christ; to have him your treasure, your righteousness, your all, and to have him your answer unto God your Father.

But if you will yet be advised, let go all, to lay hold on him: lay your souls on him, and leave him not. He is "a tried foundation-stone," and "he that trusts on him, shall not be confounded."

Ver. 22. Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels, and authorities, and powers being made subject unto him.

This is added on purpose to show us further, what he is, how high and glorious a Saviour we have!

We have here four points or steps of the exaltation of Christ:—1. Resurrection from the dead. 2. Ascension into heaven. 3. Sitting at the right hand of God. 4. In that posture, his royal authority over the angels. The particulars are clear in themselves. Of the sitting at the right hand of God, you are not ignorant that it is a borrowed expression, drawn from earth to heaven, to bring down some notion of heaven to us; to signify to us in our language, suitably to our customs, the supreme dignity of Jesus Christ, God and Man, the Mediator of the new covenant. His matchless nearness unto his Father, and the sovereignty given him over heaven and earth. And that of the subjection of angels, is but a more particular specifying of that his dignity and power, as enthroned at the Father's right hand, they being the most elevated and glorious creatures: so that his authority over all the world is implied in that subjection of the highest and noblest part of it. His victory and triumph over the angels of darkness, is an evidence of his invincible power and greatness, and matter of comfort to his saints; but this here intends his supremacy over the glorious elect angels.

That there is amongst them priority, we find;

that there is a comely order in their differences, cannot be doubted; but to marshal their degrees and stations above, is a point, not only of vain, fruitless curiosity, but of presumptuous intrusion. Whether these are names of their different particular dignities, or only different names of their general excellence and power, as I think it cannot be certainly well determined, so it imports us not to determine: only, this we know, and are particularly taught from this place, that whatsoever is their common dignity, both in names and differences, they are all subject to our glorious Head, Christ.

What confirmation they have in their state by him, though piously asserted by divines, is not so infallibly clear from the alleged Scriptures, which may bear another sense. But this is certain, that he is their King, and they acknowledge him to be so, and do incessantly admire and adore him. They rejoice in his glory, and in the glory and happiness of mankind through him. They yield him most cheerful obedience, and serve him readily in the good of his church, and of each particular believer, as he deputes and employs them.

This is the thing here intended, having in it these two: his dignity above them, and his authority over them.

1. Such is his dignity, that even that nature which he stooped below them to take on, he hath carried up and raised above them; the very earth, the flesh of man, being exalted in his person above all those heavenly spirits, who are of so excellent and pure a being in their nature, and from the beginning of the world have been clothed with such transcendent glory. A parcel of clay is made so bright, and set so high, as to outshine those bright flaming spirits,

those stars of the morning, that flesh being united to the Fountain of Light, the blessed Deity in the person of the Son.

In coming to fetch and put on this garment, he made himself "lower than the angels;" but carrying it with him, at his return to his eternal throne, and sitting down with it there, it is raised high above them; as the apostle teaches excellently and amply: "To which of them said he, Sit on my right hand?" Heb. i. 13.

This they look upon with perpetual wonder, but not with envy or repining. No, amongst all their eyes, no such eye is to be found. Yea, they rejoice in the infinite wisdom of God in this design, and his infinite love to poor lost mankind. It is wonderful, indeed, to see him filling the room of their fallen brethren with new guests from earth, yea, with such as are born heirs of hell; but that not only sinful men should thus be raised to a participation of glory with them who are spotless, sinless spirits, but their flesh, in their Redeemer, should be dignified with a glory so far beyond them,—this is that mystery the angels are intent on looking and prying into, and cannot, nor ever shall, see the bottom of it, for it hath none.

2. Jesus Christ is not only exalted above the angels in absolute dignity, but in relative authority over them. He is made Captain over those heavenly bands; they are all under his command, for all services wherein it pleases him to employ them: and the great employment he hath, is the attending on his church, and on particular elect ones. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them that shall be heirs of salvation?" Heb. i. 14. They are the servants of Christ, and in him, and at

his appointment, the servants of every believer; and are many ways serviceable and useful for their good, which truly we do not duly consider. There is no danger of overvaluing them, and inclining to worship them upon this consideration; yea, if we take it right, it will rather take us off from that. The angel judged his argument strong enough to St. John against that, that he was but "his fellow servant," Rev. xix. 10. But this is more, that they are servants to us, although not therefore inferior, it being an honourable service. Yet certainly they are inferior to our Head, and so, to his mystical body, taken in that notion, as a part of him.

Reflection 1. The height of this our Saviour's glory will appear the more, if we reflect on the descent from which he ascended to it. Oh! how low did we bring down so high a Majesty, into the pit wherein we had fallen, by climbing to be higher than he had set us! It was high indeed, as we were fallen so low, and yet he, against whom our sin was committed, came down to help us up again, and to take hold of us,—took us on; so the word is, [ἐπιλαμβάνεται,] Heb. ii. 16. He "took not hold of the angels,"—let them go, hath left them to die for ever,—"but he took hold of the seed of Abraham," and took on him indeed their flesh, dwelling amongst us, and in a mean part. He "emptied himself," ἐκένωσε, Phil. ii. 7, and became of no repute. And further, after he descended to the earth, and into our flesh, in it he became "obedient to death" upon the cross, and descended into the grave. And by these steps, he was walking towards that glory wherein he now is: "He abased himself; wherefore," says the apostle, "God hath highly exalted him," Phil. ii. 9. So he says of himself, "Ought not

Christ first to suffer these things, and so enter into his glory?" Luke xxiv. 26. Now this, indeed, it is pertinent to consider. The apostle is here upon the point of Christ's suffering; that is his theme, and therefore he is so particular in the ascending of Christ to his glory. Who, of those that would come thither, will refuse to follow him in the way wherein he led, he, [ἀρχηγὸς,] "the leader of our faith?" Heb. xii. 2. And who, of those that follow him, will not love and delight to follow him through any way, the lowest and darkest? It is excellent and safe, and then, it ends you see where.

Reflection 2. Think not strange of the Lord's method with his church, in bringing her to so low and desperate a posture many times. Can she be in a condition more seemingly desperate than was her Head,—not only in ignominious sufferings, but dead and laid in the grave, and the stone rolled to it, and sealed, and all made sure? And yet, he arose and ascended, and now sits in glory, and shall sit "till all his enemies become his footstool." Do not fear for him, that they shall overtop, yea, or be able to reach him who is exalted higher than the heavens; neither be afraid for his church, which is his body, and, if her Head be safe and alive, cannot but partake of safety and life with him. Though she were, to sight, dead and laid in the grave, yet shall she arise thence, and be more glorious than before, Isa. xxvi. 19; and still, the deeper her distress, shall rise the higher in the day of deliverance.

Thus, in his dealing with a soul, observe the Lord's method. Think it not strange that he brings a soul low, very low, which he means to comfort and exalt very high in grace and glory; that he leads it by hell's gates to heaven; that it be at that point, "My

God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Was not the Head put to use that word, and so to speak it, as the head speaks for the body, seasoning it for his members, and sweetening that bitter cup by his own drinking of it? Oh! what a hard condition may a soul be brought unto, and put to think, "Can He love me, and intend mercy for me, who leaves me to this!" And yet, in all, the Lord is preparing it thus for comfort and blessedness.

Reflection 3. Turn your thoughts more frequently to this excellent subject, the glorious high estate of our "great High Priest." The angels admire this mystery, and we slight it! They rejoice in it, and we, whom it certainly more nearly concerns, are not moved with it; we do not draw that comfort and that instruction from it, which it would plentifully afford, if it were sought after. It would comfort us against all troubles and fears to reflect—Is he not on high, who hath undertaken for us? Doth any thing befall us, but it is past first in heaven? And shall any thing pass there to our prejudice or damage? He sits there, and is upon the counsel of all, who hath loved us, and given himself for us; yea, who, as he descended thence for us, did likewise ascend thither again for us. He hath made our inheritance which he purchased there sure to us, taking possession for us, and in our name, since he is there, not only as the Son of God, but as our Surety, and as our Head. And so, the believer may think himself even already possessed of this right, inasmuch as his Christ is there. The saints are glorified already in their Head. *Ubi Caput meum regnat, ibi me regnare credo:* "Where my Head reigns, there I believe myself to reign," says Augustine. And consider, in all thy straits and troubles, outward or inward, they are not

hid from him: he knows them, and feels them; thy compassionate High Priest hath a gracious sense of thy frailties and griefs, fears and temptations, and will not suffer thee to be surcharged. He is still presenting thy state to the Father, and using that interest and power which he hath in his affection, for thy good. And what wouldst thou more? Art thou one whose heart desires to rest upon him, and cleave to him? Thou art knit so to him, that his resurrection and glory secure thee thine. His life and thine are not two, but one life, as that of the head and members; and if he could not be overcome of death, thou canst not neither. Oh! that sweet saying, "Because I live, ye shall live also," John xiv. 19.

Let thy thoughts and carriage be moulded in this contemplation rightly, ever to look on thy exalted Head. Consider his glory; see not only thy nature raised in him above the angels, but thy person interested by faith in that his glory; and then, think thyself too good to serve any base lust. Look down on sin and the world with a holy disdain, being united to him who is so exalted, and so glorious. And let not thy mind creep here: engage not thy heart to any thing that time and this earth can afford. Oh! why are we so little where there is such a spring of delightful and high thoughts for us? "If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where he sits," Col. iii. 1. What mean you? Are ye such as will let go your interest in this once crucified, and now glorified Jesus? If not, why are ye not more conformable to it? Why does it not possess your hearts more? Ought it not to be thus? Should not our hearts be where our treasure, where our blessed Head is? Oh! how unreasonable, how unfriendly is it! how much may we

be ashamed to have room in our hearts for earnest thoughts, or desires, or delights, about any thing besides him!

Were this deeply wrought upon the hearts of those that have a right in it, would there be found in them any attachment to the poor things that are passing away? Would death be a terrible word? Yea, would it not be one of the sweetest, most rejoicing thoughts to solace and ease the heart under all pressures, to look forward to that day of liberty? This infectious disease* may keep possession all the winter, and grow hot with the year again. Do not flatter yourselves, and think it is past; you have yet remembering strokes to keep it in your eye. But, however, shall we abide always here? Or is there any reason, when things are duly weighed, why we should desire it? Well, if you would be untied beforehand, and so feel your separation from this world less, this is the only way: Look up to Him who draws up all hearts that do indeed behold him. Then, I say, thy heart shall be removed beforehand; and the rest is easy and sweet. When that is done, all is gained. And consider, how he desires the completion of our union with him. Shall it be his request and earnest desire, and shall it not be ours too, that where he is, there we may be also? John xvii. 24. Let us expect it with patient submission, yet striving by desires and suits, and looking out for our release from this body of sin and death.

* This probably refers to the pestilence in 1665. See the lecture on chap. iv. 6, "Though the pestilence doth not affright you so," &c.

CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 1. Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin.

THE main of a Christian's duty lies in these two things, patience in suffering, and avoidance of sin, *ἀνέχου καὶ ἀπέχου;* and they have a natural influence each upon the other. Although affliction simply doth not, yet affliction sweetly and humbly carried doth purify and disengage the heart from sin, wean it from the world, and the common ways of it. And again, holy and exact walking keeps the soul in a sound, healthful temper, and so enables it to patient suffering, to bear things more easily; as a strong body endures fatigue, heat, cold, and hardship, with ease, a small part whereof would surcharge a sickly constitution. The consciousness of sin, and careless, unholy courses, do wonderfully weaken a soul, and distemper it, so that it is not able to endure much; every little thing disturbs it. Therefore, the apostle hath reason, both to insist so much on these two points in this Epistle, and likewise to interweave the one so often with the other, pressing jointly throughout, the cheerful bearing of all kinds of afflictions, and the careful forbearing all kinds of sin; and out of the one discourse, he slides into the other; as here.

And as the things agree in their nature, so, in their great pattern and principle, Jesus Christ: and the apostle still draws both from thence; that of patience, ch. iii. 18; that of holiness, here: "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us," &c.

The chief study of a Christian, and the very thing that makes him to be a Christian, is, conformity with Christ. *Summa religionis imitari quem colis:* "This is the sum of religion," said that wise heathen, Pythagoras, "to be like him whom thou worshippest." But this example being in itself too sublime, is brought down to our view in Christ; the brightness of God is veiled, and veiled in our own flesh, that we may be able to look on it. The inaccessible light of the Deity is so attempered in the humanity of Christ, that we may read our lesson by it in him, and may direct our walk by it. And that truly is our only way; there is nothing but wandering and perishing in all other ways, nothing but darkness and misery out of him; but "He that follows me," says he, "shall not walk in darkness," John viii. 12. And therefore is he set before us in the gospel in such clear and lively colours, that we may make this our whole endeavour, to be like him.

Consider here: 1. The high engagement to this conformity. 2. The nature of it. 3. The actual improvement of it.

1. The engagement lies in this, that he suffered for us. Of this we have treated before. Only, in reference to this, had he come down, as some have mis-imagined it, only to set us this perfect way of obedience, and give us an example of it in our own nature, this had been very much:—that the Son of God should descend to teach wretched man, and the great King descend into man, and dwell in a tabernacle of clay, to set up a school in it, for such ignorant, accursed creatures, and should, in his own person, act the hardest lessons, both in doing and suffering, to lead us in both! But the matter goes yet higher than this. Oh! how much higher hath

he suffered, not simply as our rule, but as our Surety, and in our stead! "He suffered for us in the flesh." We are the more obliged to make his suffering our example, because it was to us more than an example; it was our ransom.

This makes the conformity reasonable in a double respect. 1. It is due, that we follow him, who led thus as the "Captain of our Salvation;" that we follow him in suffering, and in doing, seeing both were so for us. It is strange how some armies have addicted themselves to their head, so as to be at his call night and day, in summer and winter, to refuse no travail or endurance of hardship for him, and all only to please him, and serve his inclination and ambition; as Cæsar's trained bands, especially the veterans, it is a wonder what they endured in counter-marches, and in traversing from one country to another. But, besides that our Lord and Leader is so great and excellent, and so well deserves following for his own worth, this lays upon us an obligation beyond all conceiving, that he first suffered for us, that he endured such hatred of men, and such wrath of God the Father, and went through death, so vile a death, to procure our life. What can be too bitter to endure, or too sweet to forsake, to follow him? Were this duly considered, should we cleave to our lusts, or to our ease? Should we not be willing to go through fire and water, yea, through death itself, yea, were it possible, through many deaths, to follow him. 2. Consider, as this conformity is due, so it is made easy by that his suffering for us. Our burden which pressed us to hell being taken off, is not all that is left, to suffer or to do, as nothing? Our chains which bound us over to eternal death being knocked off,

shall we not walk, shall we not run in his ways? Oh! think what that burden and yoke was which he hath eased us of—how heavy, how unsufferable it was! and then we shall think, what he so truly says, that all he lays on is sweet; "His yoke easy, and his burden light." Oh! the happy change, to be rescued from the vilest slavery, and called to conformity and fellowship with the Son of God!

2. The nature of this conformity, to show the nearness of it, is expressed in the very same terms as in the pattern: it is not a remote resemblance, but the same thing, even "suffering in the flesh." But that we may understand rightly what suffering is here meant, it is plainly this, "ceasing from sin." So that "suffering in the flesh," here, is not simply the enduring of afflictions, which is a part of the Christian's conformity to his Head, Christ, Rom. viii. 29, but implies a more inward and spiritual suffering. It is the suffering and the dying of our corruption, the taking away of the life of sin by the death of Christ: that death of his sinless flesh works in the believer the death of sinful flesh, that is, the corruption of his nature, which is so usually in Scripture called flesh. Sin makes man base, drowns him in flesh and the lusts of it, makes the very soul become gross and earthly, turns it, as it were, to flesh. So, the apostle calls the very mind that is unrenewed, "a carnal mind," Rom. viii. 7.

And what doth the mind of a natural man hunt after, and run out into, from one day and year to another? Is it not on the things of this base world, and (*corporis negotium*) the concernment of his flesh? What would he have, but be accommodated to eat, and drink, and dress, and live at ease? "He

minds earthly things," savours and relishes them, and cares for them. Examine the most of your pains and time, and your strongest desires, and most serious thoughts, whether they go not this way, to raise yourselves and yours in your worldly condition. Yea, the highest projects of the greatest natural spirits, are but earth still, in respect of things truly spiritual. All their state designs go not beyond this poor life that perishes in the flesh, and is daily perishing, even while we are busiest in upholding it, and providing for it. Present things and this lodge of clay, this flesh and its interest, take up most of our time and pains: the *most?* yea, all, till that change is wrought which the apostle speaks of; till Christ be put on. "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ," Rom. xiii. 14, and then the other will easily follow, which follows in the words, "make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." Once in Christ, and then your necessary general care for this natural life will be regulated and moderated by the Spirit. And as for all unlawful and enormous desires of the flesh, you shall be rid of providing for these. Instead of all provision for the life of the flesh in that sense, there is another guest, and another life, for you now to wait on and furnish for. In those who are in Christ, that flesh is dead; they are freed from its drudgery. "He that hath suffered in the flesh, hath rested from sin."

"Ceased from sin." He is at rest from it, a godly death, as they who "die in the Lord" rest from their labours, Rev. xiv. 13. He that hath suffered in the flesh, and is dead to it, dies indeed in the Lord, rests from the base turmoil of sin; it is no longer his master. As our sin was the cause of Christ's death, his death is the death of sin in us;

and that, not simply as he bore a moral pattern of it, but as the real working cause of it, it hath an effectual influence on the soul, kills it to sin. "I am crucified with Christ," says St. Paul. Gal. ii. 20. Faith so looks on the death of Christ, that it takes the impression of it, sets it on the heart, kills it unto sin. Christ and the believer do not only become one in law, so that his death stands for theirs, but one in nature, so that his death for sin causes theirs to it. They are "baptized into his death," Rom. vi. 3.

This suffering in the flesh being unto death, and such a death, crucifying, hath indeed pain in it; but what then? It must be so like his, and the believer be like him, in willingly enduring it. All the pain of his suffering in the flesh, his love to us digested and went through with; so, all the pain to our nature in severing and pulling us from our beloved sins, and in our dying to them, if his love be planted in our hearts, that will sweeten it, and make us delight in it. Love desires nothing more than likeness, and shares willingly in all with the party loved; and above all love, this Divine love is purest and highest, and works most strongly that way; takes pleasure in that pain, and is a voluntary death, as Plato calls love. It is "strong as death," says Solomon, Cant. viii. 6. As death makes the strongest body fall to the ground, so doth the love of Christ make the most active and lively sinner dead to his sin; and as death severs a man from his dearest and most familiar friends, thus doth the love of Christ, and his death flowing from it, sever the heart from its most beloved sins.

I beseech you, seek to have your hearts set against sin, to hate it, to wound it, and be dying daily to it.

Be not satisfied, unless ye feel an abatement of it, and a life within you. Disdain that base service, and being bought at so high a rate, think yourselves too good to be slaves to any base lust. You are called to a more excellent and more honourable service. And of this suffering in the flesh, we may safely say, what the apostle speaks of the sufferings with and for Christ, Rom. viii. 17, that the partakers of these sufferings are co-heirs of glory with Christ: "If we suffer thus with him, we shall also be glorified with him;" if we die with him, we shall live with him for ever.

3. We have the actual improvement of this conformity: "Arm yourselves with the same mind," or thoughts of this mortification. Death, taken naturally, in its proper sense, being an entire privation of life, admits not of degrees; but this figurative death, this mortification of the flesh in a Christian, is gradual. In so far as he is renewed, and is animated and acted by the Spirit of Christ, he is thoroughly mortified; for this death, and that new life joined with it, and here added, ver. 2, go together, and grow together; but because he is not totally renewed, and there is in him the remains of that corruption still, which is here called flesh, therefore it is his great task, to be gaining further upon it, and overcoming and mortifying it every day. And to this tend the frequent exhortations of this nature: "Mortify your members that are on the earth." So Rom. vi., "Likewise reckon yourselves dead to sin, and let it not reign in your mortal bodies." Thus here, "Arm yourselves with the same mind," or with this very thought. Consider and apply that suffering of Christ in the flesh, to the end that you with him suffering in the flesh, may

cease from sin. Think that it ought to be thus, and seek that it may be thus with you.

"Arm yourselves." There is still fighting, and sin will be molesting you; though wounded to death, yet will it struggle for life, and seek to wound its enemy; it will assault the graces that are in you. Do not think if it be once struck, and you have given it a stab near to the heart, by the "sword of the Spirit," that therefore it will stir no more. No, so long as you live in the flesh, in these bowels there will be remainders of the life of this flesh, your natural corruption; therefore ye must be armed against it. Sin will not give you rest, so long as there is a drop of blood in its vein, one spark of life in it; and that will be so long as you have life here. This old man is stout, and will fight himself to death; and at the weakest it will rouse up itself, and exert its dying spirits, as men will do sometimes more eagerly than when they were not so weak, nor so near death.

This the children of God often find to their grief, that corruptions which they thought had been cold dead, stir and rise up again, and set upon them. A passion or lust, that, after some great stroke, lay a long while as dead, stirred not, and therefore they thought to have heard no more of it, though it shall never recover fully again, to be lively as before, yet will revive in such a measure as to molest, and possibly to foil them yet again. Therefore it is continually necessary that they live in arms, and put them not off to their dying day; till they put off the body, and be altogether free of the flesh. You may take the Lord's promise for victory in the end; that shall not fail; but do not promise yourself ease in the way, for that will not hold. If at some times

you be undermost, give not all for lost; he hath often won the day, who hath been foiled and wounded in the fight. But likewise take not all for won, so as to have no more conflict, when sometimes you have the better, as in particular battles. Be not desperate when you lose, nor secure when you gain them: when it is worse with you, do not throw away your arms, nor lay them away when you are at best.

Now, the way to be armed is this, "the same mind:" how would my Lord, Christ, carry himself in this case? And what was *his* business in all places and companies? Was it not to do the will, and advance the glory of his Father? If I be injured and reviled, consider how would he do in this? Would he repay one injury with another, one reproach with another reproach? No, "being reviled, he reviled not again." Well, through his strength, this shall be my way too. Thus ought it to be with the Christian, framing all his ways, and words, and very thoughts, upon that model, "the mind of Christ," and studying in all things to walk even as he walked; studying it much, as the reason and rule of mortification, and drawing from it, as the real cause and spring of mortification.

The pious contemplation of his death will most powerfully kill the love of sin in the soul, and kindle an ardent hatred of it. The believer, looking on his Jesus as crucified for him and "wounded for his transgressions," and taking in deep thoughts of his spotless innocency, which deserved no such thing, and of his matchless love, which yet endured it all for him, will then naturally think, Shall I be a friend to that which was his deadly enemy? Shall sin be sweet to me, which was so bitter to him, and

that for my sake? Shall I ever lend it a good look, or entertain a favourable thought of that which shed my Lord's blood? Shall I live in that for which he died, and died to kill it in me? Oh! let it not be.

To the end it may not be, let such really apply *that* death, to work this on the soul; (for this is always to be added, and is the main thing indeed;) by holding and fastening that death close to the soul, effectually to kill the effects of sin in it; to stifle and crush them dead, by pressing that death on the heart; looking on it, not only as a most complete model, but as having a most effectual virtue for this effect; and desiring him, entreating our Lord himself, who communicates himself and the virtue of his death to the believer, that he would powerfully cause it to flow in upon us, and let us feel the virtue of it.

It is, then, the only thriving and growing life, to be much in the lively contemplation and application of Jesus Christ; to be continually studying him, and conversing with him, and drawing from him, "receiving of his fulness, grace for grace," John i. 16. Wouldst thou have much power against sin, and much increase of holiness, let thine eye be much on Christ; set thine heart on him; let it dwell in him, and be still with him. When sin is likely to prevail in any kind, go to him, tell him of the insurrection of his enemies, and thy inability to resist, and desire him to suppress them, and to help thee against them, that they may gain nothing by their stirring, but some new wound. If thy heart begin to be taken with and move towards sin, lay it before him; the beams of his love shall eat out that fire of those sinful lusts. Wouldst thou

have thy pride and passions, and love of the world, and self-love, killed, go sue for the virtue of his death, and that shall do it. Seek his Spirit, the spirit of meekness, and humility, and Divine love. Look on him, and he shall draw thy heart heavenwards, and unite it to himself, and make it like himself. And is not that the thing thou desirest?

Ver. 2. That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.
3. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries.

The chains of sin are so strong, and so fastened on our nature, that there is in us no power to break them off, till a mightier and stronger spirit than our own come into us. The Spirit of Christ dropped into the soul, makes it able to "break through a troop, and leap over a wall," as David speaks of himself, when furnished with the strength of his God, Psa. xviii. 29. Men's resolutions fall to nothing; and as a prisoner who attempts to escape, and does not, is bound faster, thus usually it is with men in their self-purposes of forsaking sin: they leave out Christ in the work, and so remain in their captivity, yea, it grows upon them. And while we press them to free themselves, and show not Christ to them, we put them upon an impossibility. But to look to him makes it feasible and easy. Faith in him, and that love to him which faith begets, break through and surmount all difficulties. It is the powerful love of Christ that kills the love of sin, and kindles the love of holiness in the soul; makes it a willing sharer in his death, and so, a happy

partaker of his life. For that always follows, and must of necessity, as here is added: "He that hath suffered in the flesh, hath ceased from sin,"— is crucified and dead to it; but he loses nothing; yea, it is his great gain, to lose that deadly life of the flesh for a new spiritual life, a life indeed "living unto God;" that is the end why he so dies, that he may thus live—"That he no longer should live to the lusts of men," and yet live far better, "live to the will of God." He that is one with Christ by believing, is one with him throughout, in death and in life. As Christ rose from the dead, so he that is dead to sin with him, through the power of his death, rises to that new life with him, through the power of his resurrection. And these two constitute our sanctification, which, whosoever do partake of Christ, and are found in him, do certainly draw from him. Thus are they joined, Rom. vi. 11. "Likewise reckon ye yourselves dead indeed to sin, but alive to God," and both, "through Christ Jesus our Lord."

All those who do really come to Jesus Christ, as they come to him as their Saviour to be clothed with him, and made righteous by him, so they come likewise to him as their Sanctifier, to be made new and holy by him, to die and live with him, to "follow the Lamb wheresoever he goes," through the hardest sufferings, and death itself. And this spiritual suffering and dying with him, is the universal way of all his followers; they are all martyrs thus in the crucifying of sinful flesh, and so dying for him, and with him. And they may well go cheerfully through. Though it bear the unpleasant name of *death*, yet, as the other death is, (which makes it so little terrible, yea, often to appear

so very desirable to them,) so is this, the way to a far more excellent and happy life; so that they may pass through it gladly, both for the company and the end of it. It is with Christ they go into his death, as unto life in his life. Though a believer might be free from these terms, he would not. No, surely. Could he be content with that easy life of sin, instead of the Divine life of Christ? No, he will do thus, and "not accept of deliverance, that he may obtain," as the apostle speaks of the martyrs, "a better resurrection," Heb. xi. 35. Think on it again, you to whom your sins are dear still, and this life sweet; you are yet far from Christ, and his life.

The apostle, with the intent to press this more home, expresses more at large the nature of the opposite states and lives that he speaks of, and so, 1. Sets before his Christian brethren the dignity of that new life; and then, 2. By a particular reflection upon the former life, he presses the change. The former life he calls a living "to the lusts of men;" this new spiritual life, a living "to the will of God."

"The lusts of men." Such as are common to the corrupt nature of man: such as every man may find in himself, and perceive in others. The apostle, in the third verse more particularly, for further clearness, specifies those kinds of men that were most notorious in these lusts, and those kinds of lusts that were most notorious in men. Writing to the dispersed Jews, he calls sinful lusts the will of the Gentiles, as having least control of contrary light in them; (and yet, the Jews walked in the same, though they had the law as a light and rule for avoiding them;) and implies, that these lusts

were unbeseeming even their former condition as Jews, but much more unsuitable to them as now Christians. Some of the grossest of these lusts he names, meaning all the rest, all the ways of sin, and so representing their vileness in the more lively manner. Not, as some take it, when they hear of such heinous sins, as if it were to lessen the evil of sins of a more civil nature by the comparison, or as if freedom from these were a blameless condition, and a change of it needless; no, the Holy Ghost means it just contrary, that we may judge of all sin, and of our sinful nature, by our estimate of those sins that are most discernible and abominable. All sin, though not equal in degree, yet is of one nature, and originally springs from one root, arising from the same unholy nature of man, and contrary to the same holy nature and will of God.

So then, 1. Those who walk in these highways of impiety, and yet will have the name of Christians, they are the shame of Christians and the professed enemies of Jesus Christ, and of all others the most hateful to him: they seem to have taken on his name, for no other end than to shame and disgrace it. But he will vindicate himself, and the blot shall rest upon these impudent persons, who dare hold up their faces in the church of God as parts of it, and are indeed nothing but the dishonour of it, spots and blots; who dare profess to worship God as his people, and remain unclean, riotous, and profane persons. How suits thy sitting here before the Lord, and thy sitting with vile ungodly company on the ale-bench? How agrees the word, sounds it well—There goes a drunken Christian, an unclean, a basely covetous, or earthly-minded Christian? And the naming of the latter is not

beside the text, but agreeable to the very words of it; for the apostle warrants us to take it under the name of "idolatry," and in that name he reckons it to be mortified by a Christian: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is IDOLATRY," Col. iii. 5.

2. But yet, men who are some way exempted from the blot of these foul impieties, may still remain slaves to sin, alive to it, and dead to God, living to the lusts of men, and not to the will of God, pleasing others and themselves, and displeasing him. And the smoothest, best bred, and most moralized natural man, is in this base thraldom; and he is the more miserable, in that he dreams of liberty in the midst of his chains, thinks himself clean by looking on those that wallow in gross profaneness; takes measure of himself by the most crooked lives of ungodly men about him, and so thinks himself very straight; but lays not the straight rule of the will of God to his ways and heart, which if he did, he would then discover much crookedness in his ways, and much more in his heart, that now he sees not, but takes it to be square and even.

Therefore I advise and desire you to look more narrowly to yourselves in this, and see whether you be not still living to your own lusts and wills instead of to God, seeking, in all your ways, to advance and please yourselves, and not him. Is not the bent of your hearts set that way? Do not your whole desires and endeavours run in that channel, how you and yours may be somebody, and how you may have wherewithal to serve the flesh, and to be accounted of and respected amongst men? And if we trace it home, all a man's honouring and pleasing

of others, tends to, and ends in pleasing of himself: it resolves into that. And is it not so meant by him? He pleases men, either that he may gain by them, or be respected by them, or that something which is still pleasing to himself may be the return of it. So, self is the grand idol, for which all other heart-idolatries are committed; and, indeed, in the unrenewed heart there is no scarcity of them. Oh! what multitudes, what heaps, if the wall were digged through, and the light of God going before us, and leading us in to see them! The natural motion and way of the natural heart, is no other than still seeking out new inventions, a forge of new gods, still either forming them to itself, or worshipping those it hath already framed; committing spiritual fornication from God, with the creature, and multiplying lovers every where, as it is tempted; as the Lord complains of his people, "upon every high hill, and under every green tree," Jer. ii. 20; iii. 6.

You will not believe so much ill of yourselves, will not be convinced of this unpleasant but necessary truth; and this is a part of our self-pleasing, that we please ourselves in this, that we will not see it, either in our callings and ordinary ways, or in our religious exercises. For even in these, we naturally aim at nothing but ourselves; either our reputation, or, at best, our own safety and peace; either to stop the cry of conscience for the present, or to escape the wrath that is to come; but not in a spiritual regard to the will of God, and out of pure love to himself for himself; yet, thus it should be, and that love, the Divine fire in all our sacrifices. The carnal mind is in the dark, and sees not its vileness in living to itself, will not confess it to be

so. But when God comes into the soul, he lets it see itself, and all its idols and idolatries, and forces it to abhor and loathe itself for all its abominations: and having discovered its filthiness to itself, then he purges and cleanses it for himself, "from all its filthiness, and from all its idols," according to his promise, Ezek. xxxvi. 25, and comes in and takes possession of it for himself, enthrones himself in the heart. And it is never right nor happy till that be done.

"But to the will of God." We readily take any little slight change for true conversion, but we may see here that we mistake it; it doth not barely knock off some obvious, apparent enormities, but casts all in a new mould, alters the whole frame of the heart and life, kills a man, and makes him alive again. And this new life is contrary to the old; for the change is made with that intent, "that he live no longer to the lusts of men, but to the will of God." He is now, indeed, "a new creature," having a new judgment and new thoughts of things, and so, accordingly, new desires and affections, and answerably to these, new actions. Old things are passed away and dead, and all things are become new, 2 Cor. v. 17.

Political men have observed, that in states, if alterations must be, it is better to alter many things than a few. And physicians have the same remark for one's habit and custom for bodily health, upon the same ground; because things do so relate one to another, that except they be adapted and suited together in the change, it avails not; yea, it sometimes proves the worse in the whole, though a few things in particular seem to be bettered. Thus, half-reformations in a Christian turn to his prejudice:

it is only best to be reformed throughout, and to give up with all idols; not to live one half to himself and the world, and, as it were, another half to God, for that is but falsely so, and, in reality, it cannot be. The only way is, to make a heap of all, to have all sacrificed together, and to live to no lust, but altogether and only to God. Thus it must be: there is no monster in the new creation, no half new creature, "either all, or not at all," ὅλος ἢ μὴ ὅλως. We have to deal with the Maker and the Searcher of the heart in this turn, and he will have nothing unless he have the heart, and none of that neither, unless he have it all. If thou pass over into his kingdom, and become his subject, thou must have him for thy only Sovereign. *Omnisque potestas impatiens consortis:* "royalty can admit of no rivalry," and least of all, the highest and best of all. If Christ be thy King, then his laws and sceptre must rule all in thee; thou must now acknowledge no foreign power; that will be treason.

And if he be thy Husband, thou must renounce all others. Wilt thou provoke him to jealousy? Yea, beware how thou givest a thought or a look of thy affection any other way, for he will spy it, and will not endure it. The title of a husband is as strict and tender, as the other of a king.

It is only best to be thus: it is thy great advantage and happiness, to be thus entirely freed from so many tyrannous base lords, and to be now subject only to one, and he so great, and withal so gracious and sweet a King, "the Prince of Peace." Thou wast hurried before, and racked with the very multitude of them. Thy lusts so many cruel taskmasters over thee, they gave thee no rest, and the work they set thee to was base and slavish, more

than the burdens, and pots, and toiling in the clay of Egypt; thou wast held to work in the earth, to pain, and to soil and foul thyself with their drudgery.

Now thou hast but one to serve, and that is a great ease; and it is no slavery, but true honour, to serve so excellent a Lord, and in such high services; for he puts thee upon nothing but what is neat, and what is honourable. Thou art as "a vessel of honour" in his house, for his best employments. Now, thou art not in pain how to please this person and the other, nor needest thou vex thyself to gain men, to study their approbation and honour, nor to keep to thine own lusts, and observe their will. Thou hast none but thy God to please in all; and if he be pleased, thou mayest disregard who be displeased. His will is not fickle and changing as men's are, and as thine own is. He hath told thee what he likes and desires, and he alters not; so that now thou knowest whom thou hast to do withal, and what to do, whom to please, and what will please him, and this cannot but much settle thy mind, and put thee at ease. Thou mayest say heartily, as rejoicing in the change of so many for one, and of such for such a one, as the church says, "O Lord our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over me, but now, by thee only will I make mention of thy name," Isa. xxvi. 13. Now none but thyself, not so much as the name of them any more —away with them: through thy grace, thou only shalt be my God. It cannot endure that any thing be named with thee.

Now, 1. That it may be thus, that we may wholly live "to the will of God," we must "know" his will, what it is. Persons grossly ignorant of God and of

his will, cannot live to him. We cannot "have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness;" for "HE is light," 1 John i. 6, 7. This takes off a great many amongst us, who have not so much as a common notion of the will of God. But besides, that knowledge which is a part, and, I may say, the first part, of the renewed image of God, is not a natural knowledge of spiritual things, merely attained by human teaching or industry, but it is a beam of God's own, issuing from himself, both enlightening and enlivening the whole soul: it gains the affection, and stirs to action, and so, indeed, it acts, and increases by acting; for the more we walk according to what we know of the will of God, the more we shall be advanced to know more. This is the real "proving what is his good, and holy, and acceptable will," Rom. xii. 2. So says Christ, "If any one will do the will of my Father, he shall know of the doctrine," John vii. 17. Our lying off from the lively use of known truth, keeps us low in the knowledge of God, and communion with him.

2. So then, upon that knowledge of God's will, where it is spiritual and from himself, follows the suiting of the heart with it, the affections taking the stamp of it, and agreeing with it, "receiving the truth in the love of it," so that the heart may be transformed into it; and now it is not driven to obedience violently, but sweetly moving to it, by love within the heart, framed to the love of God, and so of his will.

3. As Divine knowledge begets this affection, so this affection will bring forth action, real obedience. For these three are inseparably linked, and each dependent on, and the product of the others. The affection is not blind, but flowing from knowledge;

nor the actual obedience constrained, but flowing from affection; and the affection is not idle, seeing it brings forth obedience; nor is the knowledge dead, seeing it begets affection.

Thus the renewed, the living Christian, is all for God, a sacrifice entirely offered up to God, and "a living sacrifice," which lives to God. He takes no more notice of his own carnal will; hath renounced that to embrace the holy will of God; and therefore, though there is a contrary law and will in him, yet he does not acknowledge it, but only the law of Christ, as now established in him; that law of love, by which he is sweetly and willingly led. Real obedience consults not now with flesh and blood, what will please them, but only inquires what will please his God, and knowing his mind, thus resolves to demur no more, nor to ask consent of any other; that he will do, and it is reason enough to him—My Lord wills it, therefore, in his strength, I will do it; for now I live to his will, it is my life to study and obey it.

Now, we know what is the true character of the redeemed of Christ, that they are freed from the service of themselves and of the world, yea, dead to it, and have no life but for God, as altogether his.

Let it, then, be our study and ambition to attain this, and to grow in it; to be daily further freed from all other ways and desires, and more wholly addicted to the will of our God; displeased when we find any thing else stir or move within us but that, making that the spring of our motion in every work.

1. Because we know that his sovereign will is (and is most justly) the glory of his name, therefore

we are not to rest till this be set up in our view, as our end in all things, and we are to account all our plausible doings as hateful, as indeed they are, which are not aimed at this end; yea, endeavouring to have it as frequently and as expressly before us as we can, still keeping our eye on the mark; throwing away, yea, undoing our own interest, not seeking ourselves in any thing, but him in all.

2. As living to his will is in all things to be our end, so, in all the way to that end, it is to be the rule of every step. For we cannot attain his end but in his way; nor can we attain it without a resignation of the way to his prescription, taking all our directions from him, how we shall honour him in all. The soul that lives to him, hath enough to make any thing not only warrantable but amiable in seeking his will; and he not only does it, but delights to do it. This is to live to him, to find it our life; as we speak of a work wherein men do most, and with most delight, employ themselves. That such a lust be crucified, is it thy will, Lord? Then, no more advising, no more delay. How dear soever that was when I lived to it, it is now as hateful, seeing I live to thee who hatest it. Wilt thou have me forget an injury, though a great one, and love the person that hath wronged me? While I lived to myself and my passions, this had been hard. But now, how sweet is it! seeing I live to thee, and am glad to be put upon things most opposite to my corrupt heart; glad to trample upon my own will, to follow thine. And this I daily aspire to and aim at, to have no will of my own, but that thine be in me, that I may live to thee, as one with thee, and thou my rule and delight; yea, not to use the very natural comforts of my life, but for

thee; to eat, and drink, and sleep for thee; and not to please myself, but to be enabled to serve and please thee; to make one offering of myself and all my actions to thee, my Lord.

Oh! it is the only sweet life, to be living thus, and daily learning to live more fully thus! It is heaven this, a little scantling of it here, and a pledge of whole heaven. This is, indeed, the life of Christ, not only like his, but one with his; it is his Spirit, his life derived into the soul, and, therefore, both the most excellent, and, certainly, the most permanent life, for "he dieth no more," and therefore this his life cannot be extinguished. Hence is the perseverance of the saints; because they have one life with Christ, and so are alive unto God, once for all, for ever.

It is true, the former custom of sin would plead with grace old possession; and this the apostle implies here, that because formerly we lived to our lusts, they will urge that; but he teaches us to beat it directly back on them, and turn the edge of it as a most strong reason against them: true, you had so long time of us, the more is our sorrow and shame, and the more reason that it be no longer so.

"The rest of his time in the flesh," that is, in this body, is not to be spent as the foregoing, in living to the flesh, that is, the corrupt lusts of it, and the common ways of the world; but, as often as the Christian looks back on that, he is to find it as a spur in his side, to be the more earnest, and more wholly busied in living much to God, having lived so long contrary to him, in living to the flesh. "The past may suffice." There is a rhetorical figure (a lyptote) in that expression, meaning much

more than the words express: it is *enough*—oh! too *much*, to have lived so long so miserable a life.

Now, says the Christian, O corrupt lusts and deluding world, look for no more; I have served you too long. The rest, whatsoever it is, must be to my Lord, to live to him by whom I live; and ashamed and grieved I am I was so long in beginning; so much past, it may be the most of my short race past, before I took notice of God, or looked towards him. Oh! how have I lost, and worse than lost, all my by-past days! Now, had I the advantages and abilities of many men, and were I to live many ages, all should be to live to my God, and honour him. And what strength I have, and what time I shall have, through his grace, shall be wholly his. And when any Christian hath thus resolved, his intended life being so imperfect, and the time so short, the poorness of the offer would break his heart, were there not an eternity before him, wherein he shall live to his God, and in him, without blemish and without end.

Spiritual things being once discerned by a spiritual light, the whole soul is carried after them; and the ways of holiness are never truly sweet, till they are thoroughly embraced, and till there is a full renunciation of all that is contrary to them. All his former ways of wandering from God, are very hateful to a Christian who is indeed returned and brought home; and those are most of all hateful, wherein he hath most wandered and most delighted. A sight of Christ gains the heart, makes it break from all entanglements both of its own lusts, and of the profane world about it. And these are the two things the apostle here aims at. Exhorting

Christians to the study of newness of life, and showing the necessity of it, that they cannot be Christians without it, he opposes their new state and engagement to the old customs of their former condition, and to the continuing custom and conceit of the ungodly world, that against both they may maintain that rank and dignity to which now they are called, and, in a holy disdain of both, walk as the redeemed of the Lord. Their own former custom he speaks to in these verses, and to the custom and opinion of the world, in those which follow. Both of these will set strong upon a man, especially while he is yet weak, and newly entered into that new state.

Now, as to the first, his old acquaintance, his wonted lusts, will not fail to bestir themselves to accost him in their most obliging, familiar way, and represent their long-continued friendship. But the Christian, following the principles of his new being, will not entertain any long discourse with them, but cut them short, tell them that the change he hath made he avows, and finds it so happy, that these former delights may put off hopes of regaining him. No, they dress themselves in their best array, and put on all their ornaments, and say as that known word of the courtesan, "I am the same I was," the Christian will answer as he did, "I am *not* the same I was." And not only thus will he turn off the plea of former acquaintance that sin makes, but turn it back upon it, as in his present thoughts, making much against it—The longer I was so deluded, the more reason now that I be wiser; the more time so misspent, the more pressing necessity of redeeming it. Oh! I have too long lived in that vile slavery. All was but husks I fed on. "I was

laying out my money for that which was no bread, and my labour for that which satisfied not," Isa. lv. 2. Now I am on the pursuit of a good that I am sure will satisfy, will fill the largest desires of my soul; and shall I be sparing and slack, or shall any thing call me off from it? Let it not be. I who took so much pains, early and late, to serve and sacrifice to so base a god, shall I not now live more to my new Lord, the living God, and sacrifice my time and strength, and my whole self to him?

And this is still the regret of the sensible Christian, that he cannot attain to that unwearied diligence and that strong bent of affection, in seeking communion with God, and living to him, which once he had for the service of sin: he wonders that it should be thus with him, not to equal that which it were so reasonable that he should so far exceed.

It is, beyond expression, a thing to be lamented, that so small a number of men regard God, the Author of their being, that so few live to him in whom they live, returning that being and life they have, and all their enjoyments, as is due, to him from whom they all flow. And then, how pitiful is it, that the small number who are thus minded, mind it so remissly and coldly, and are so far outstripped by the "children of this world," who follow painted follies and lies with more eagerness and industry than the "children of wisdom" do that certain and solid blessedness which they seek after! *Plus illi ad vanitatem, quam nos ad veritatem:* "They are more intent upon vanity, than we upon verity." Strange! that men should do so much violence one to another, and to themselves in body and mind, for trifles and chaff; and that there is so little to be found of that allowed and commanded

"violence," for "a kingdom," and such a kingdom, "that cannot be moved," Heb. xii. 28; a word too high for all the monarchies under the sun.

And should not our diligence and violence in this so worthy a design, be so much the greater, the later we begin to pursue it? They tell of Cæsar, that when he passed into Spain, meeting there with Alexander's statue, it occasioned him to weep, considering that he was up so much more early, having performed so many conquests in those years, wherein he thought he himself had done nothing, and was yet but beginning. Truly, it will be a sad thought to a really renewed mind, to look back on the flower of youth and strength as lost in vanity; if not in gross profaneness, yet, in self-serving and self-pleasing, and in ignorance and neglect of God. And perceiving their few years so far spent ere they set out, they will account days precious, and make the more haste, and desire, with holy David, "enlarged hearts to run the way of God's commandments," Psa. cxix. 32. They will study to live much in a little time; and, having lived all the past time to no purpose, will be sensible they have none now to spare upon the lusts and ways of the flesh, and vain societies and visits. Yea, they will be redeeming all they can even from their necessary affairs, for that which is more necessary than all other necessities, "that one thing needful," to learn the will of our God, and live to it: this is our business, our "high calling," the main and most excellent of all our employments.

Not that we are to cast off our particular callings, or omit due diligence in them; for that would prove a snare, and involve a person in things more opposite to godliness. But certainly, this "living

to God" requires, 1. A fit measuring of thy own ability for affairs, and, as far as thou canst choose, fitting thy load to thy shoulders, not surcharging thyself with it. An excessive burden of businesses, either by the greatness or the multitude of them, will not fail to entangle thee and depress thy mind, and will hold it so down, that thou shalt not find it possible to walk upright and look upwards, with that freedom and frequency which becomes heirs of heaven.

2. The measure of thy affairs being adapted, look to thy affection in them, that it be regulated too. Thy heart may be engaged in thy little business as much, if thou watch it not, as in many and great affairs. A man may drown in a little brook or pool, as well as in a great river, if he be down and plunge himself into it, and put his head under water. Some care thou must have, that thou mayest not care. Those things that are thorns indeed, thou must make a hedge of them, to keep out those temptations that accompany sloth, and extreme want that waits on it; but let them be the hedge: suffer them not to grow within the garden. "If riches increase, set not thy heart on them," nor set them in thy heart. That place is due to another, is made to be the garden of thy beloved Lord, made for the best plants and flowers, and there they ought to grow, the love of God, and faith, and meekness, and the other fragrant graces of the Spirit. And know that this is no common nor easy matter, to keep the heart disengaged in the midst of affairs, that still it be reserved for him whose right it is.

3. Not only labour to keep thy mind spiritual in itself, but by it put a spiritual stamp even upon thy temporal employments; and so thou shalt live

to God, not only without prejudice of thy calling, but even in it, and shalt converse with him in thy shop, or in the field, or in thy journey, doing all in obedience to him, and offering all, and thyself withal, as a sacrifice to him; thou still with him, and he still with thee, in all. This is to live to the will of God indeed, to follow his direction, and intend his glory in all. Thus the wife in the very oversight of her house, and the husband in his affairs abroad, may be living to God, raising their low employments to a high quality this way: Lord, even this mean work I do for thee, complying with thy will, who hast put me in this station, and given me this task. "Thy will be done." Lord, I offer up even this work to thee. Accept of me, and of my desire to obey thee in all. And as in their work, so in their refreshments and rest, Christians do all for him. "Whether ye eat, or drink," says the apostle, 1 Cor. x. 31, "or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God;" doing all for this reason, because it is his will, and for this end, that he may have glory; bending the use of all our strength and all his mercies that way: setting this mark on all our designs and way—This for the glory of my God, and, this further for his glory, and so from one thing to another throughout our whole life. This is the art of keeping the heart spiritual in all affairs, yea, of spiritualizing the affairs themselves in their use, that in themselves are earthly. This is the elixir that turns lower metal into gold, the mean actions of this life in a Christian's hands into obedience and holy offerings unto God.

And, were we acquainted with the way of intermixing holy thoughts, ejaculatory eyeings of God, in our ordinary ways, it would keep the heart in a

sweet temper all the day long, and have an excellent influence into all our ordinary actions and holy performances, at those times when we apply ourselves solemnly to them. Our hearts would be near them, not so far off to seek and call in, as usually they are through the neglect of this. This were to "walk with God" indeed; to go all the day long as in our Father's hand; whereas, without this, our praying morning and evening looks but as a formal visit, not delighting in that constant converse which yet is our happiness and honour, and makes all estates sweet. This would refresh us in the hardest labour; as they that carry the spices from Arabia are refreshed with the smell of them in their journey, and some observe, that it keeps their strength, and frees them from fainting.

If you would then live to God indeed, be not satisfied without the constant regard of him; and whosoever hath attained most of it, study it yet more, "to set the Lord always before you," as David professeth, and then shall you have that comfort that he adds, he shall be still "at your right hand, that you shall not be moved," Psa. xvi. 8.

And you that are yet to begin this, think what his patience is, that after you have slighted so many calls, you may yet begin to seek him, and live to him. And then, consider, if you still despise all this goodness, how soon it may be otherwise; you may be past the reach of this call, and may not begin, but be cut off for ever from the hopes of it. Oh, how sad a state! and the more so by the remembrance of these slighted offers and invitations! Will you then yet return? You that would share in Christ, let go those lusts to which you have hitherto lived, and embrace him, and in him there is spirit

and life for you. He shall enable you to live this heavenly life to the will of God, "his God and your God, and his Father and your Father," John xx. 17. Oh! delay no longer this happy change. How soon may that puff of breath that is in thy nostrils, who hearest this, be extinguished! And art thou willing to die in thy sins, rather than that they should die before thee? Thinkest thou it a pain to live to the will of God? Surely it will be more pain to lie under his eternal wrath. Oh! thou knowest not how sweet they find it who have tried it. Or thinkest thou, I will afterwards? Who can make thee sure either of that afterwards, or of that will? If but afterwards, why not now presently, without further debate? Hast thou not served sin long enough? May not the time passed in that service suffice? yea, is it not too much? Wouldst thou only live unto God as little time as may be, and think the dregs of thy life good enough for him? What ingratitude and gross folly is this! Yea, though thou wert sure of coming unto him and being accepted, yet, if thou knewest him in any measure, thou wouldst not think it a privilege to defer it, but willingly choose to be free from the world and thy lusts, to be immediately his, and wouldst, with David, "make haste, and not delay to keep his righteous judgments." All the time thou livest without him, what a filthy, wretched life is it, if that can be called life which is without him! To live to sin, is to live still in a dungeon; but to live to the will of God, is to walk in liberty and light, to walk by light unto light, by the beginnings of it to the fulness of it, which is in his presence.

Ver. 4. Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you:
5. Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.

Grace, until it reach its home and end in glory, is still in conflict; there is a restless party within and without, yea, the whole world against it. It is a stranger here, and is accounted and used as such. "They think it strange that ye run not with them, and they speak evil of you:" these wondering thoughts they vent in reproaching words.

In these two verses we have these three things: 1. The Christian's opposite course to that of the world. 2. The world's opposite thoughts and speeches of this course. 3. The supreme and final judgment of both.

1. The opposite course, in that "They run to excesses of riot—You run not with them." They run to excesses (ἀσωτίας) of riot or luxury. Though all natural men are not, in the grossest kind, guilty of this, yet they are all of them in some way truly riotous or luxurious, lavishing away themselves, and their days, upon the poor perishing delights of sin, each according to his own palate and humour. As all persons that are riotous, in the common sense of it, gluttons or drunkards, do not love the same kind of meats or drink, but have several relishes or appetites, yet they agree in the nature of the sin; so the notion enlarged after that same manner, to the different custom of corrupt nature, takes in all the ways of sin: some are glutting in, and continually drunk with pleasures and carnal enjoyments; others, with the cares of this life, which our Saviour reckons with surfeiting and drunkenness, as being a kind of it, and surcharging the heart as they do: as there

he expresses it, Luke xxi. 34, "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life." Whatsoever it is that draws away the heart from God, that, how plausible soever, doth debauch and destroy us: we spend and undo ourselves upon it, as the word signifies, ἀσωτία, a making havoc of all. And the other word, ἀνάχυσις, signifies profusion, and dissolute lavishing, a pouring out of the affections upon vanity; they are scattered and defiled as water spilt upon the ground, that cannot be cleansed nor gathered up again. And, indeed, it passes all our skill and strength, to recover and recollect our hearts for God; he only can do it for himself. He who made it, can gather it, and cleanse it, and make it anew, and unite it to himself. Oh! what a scattered, broken, unstable thing is the carnal heart, till it is changed, falling in love with every gay folly it meets withal, and running out to rest profusely upon things like its vain self, which suit and agree with it, and serve its lusts! It can dream and muse upon these long enough, upon any thing that feeds the earthliness or pride of it; it can be prodigal of hours, and let out floods of thoughts, where a little is too much, but is bounded and straitened where all are too little; hath not one fixed thought in a whole day to spare for God.

And truly, this running out of the heart is a continual drunkenness and madness: it is not capable of reason, and will not be stopped in its current by any persuasion; it is "mad upon its idols," as the prophet speaks, Jer. l. 38. You may as well speak to a river in its course, and bid it stay, as speak to an impenitent sinner in the course of his iniquity; and all the other means you can use, is but as the

putting of your finger to a rapid stream, to stay it. But there is a hand can both stop and turn the most impetuous torrent of the heart, be it even "the heart of a king," which will least endure any other controlment, Prov. xxi. 1.

Now, as the ungodly world naturally moves to this profusion with a strong and swift motion, "runs" to it, so, it *runs together* to it, and that makes the current both the stronger and the swifter; as a number of brooks, falling into one main channel, make a mighty stream. And every man naturally is, in his birth, and in the course of his life, just as a brook, that of itself is carried to that stream of sin which is in the world, and then, falling into it, is carried rapidly along with it. And if every sinner, taken apart, be so inconvertible by all created power, how much more hard a task is a public reformation, the turning of a land from its course of wickedness! All that is set to dam up their way, doth at the best but stay them a little, and they swell and rise, and run over with more noise and violence than if they had not been stopped. Thus we find outward restraints prove, and thus the very public judgments of God on us. They may have made a little interruption, but, upon the abatement of them, the course of sin, in all kinds, seems to be now more fierce, as it were, to regain the time lost in that constrained forbearance. So that we see the need of much prayer to entreat his powerful hand, which can turn the course of Jordan, that he would work, not a temporary, but an abiding change of the course of this land, and cause many souls to look upon Jesus Christ, and flow into him, as the word is in Psa. xxxiv. 5.

This is their course, but "you run not with them."

The godly are a small and weak company, and yet run counter to the grand torrent of the world, just against them. And there is a Spirit within them, whence that their contrary motion flows; a Spirit strong enough to maintain it in them, against all the crowd and combined course of the ungodly. "Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world," 1 John iv. 4. As Lot in Sodom, his righteous soul was not carried with them, but was "vexed with their ungodly doings." There is, to a believer, the example of Christ, to set against the example of the world, and the Spirit of Christ, against the spirit of the world; and these are by far the more excellent, and the stronger. Faith looking to him, and drawing virtue from him, makes the soul surmount all discouragements and oppositions. So, Heb. xii. 2, "Looking to Jesus:" and that not only as an example worthy to oppose to all the world's examples; the saints were so, yet he more than they all; but further, he is "the Author and Finisher of our faith;" and so we eye him, as having "endured the cross, and despised the shame," and as having "sat down at the right hand of the throne of God," not only that, in doing so, we may follow him in that way, unto that end, as our Pattern, but as our Head, from whom we borrow our strength so to follow "the Author and Finisher of our faith." And so, 1 John v. 4, "This is our victory, whereby we overcome the world, even our faith."

The Spirit of God shows the believer clearly both the baseness of the ways of sin, and the wretched measure of their end. That Divine light discovers the fading and false blush of the pleasures of sin, that there is nothing under them but true deformity and rottenness, which the deluded, gross world does

not see, but takes the first appearance of it for true and solid beauty, and so is enamoured with a painted strumpet. And as he sees the vileness of that love of sin, he sees the final unhappiness of it, that "her ways lead down to the chambers of death." Methinks a believer is as one standing upon a high tower, who sees the way wherein the world runs, in a valley, as an unavoidable precipice, a steep edge hanging over the bottomless pit, where all that are not reclaimed, fall over before they be aware; this they, in their low way, perceive not, and therefore walk and run on in the smooth pleasures and ease of it towards their perdition; but he that sees the end, will not "run with them."

And as he hath, by that light of the Spirit, this clear reason for thinking on and taking another course, so, by that Spirit, he hath a very natural bent to a contrary motion, so that he cannot be one with them. That Spirit moves him upwards whence it came, and makes that, in so far as he is renewed, his natural motion. Though he hath a clog of flesh that cleaves to him, and so breeds him some difficulty, yet, in the strength of that new nature, he overcomes it, and goes on till he attain his end, where all the difficulty in the way presently is overrewarded and forgotten. This makes amends for every weary step, that every one of those who walk in that way shall "appear in Zion before God," Psa. lxxxiv. 7.

2. We have their opposite thoughts and speeches of each other. "They think it strange, speaking evil of you." The Christian and the carnal man are most wonderful to each other. The one wonders to see the other walk so strictly, and deny himself to those carnal liberties which the most take, and take

for so necessary, that they think they could not live without them. And the Christian thinks it strange that men should be so bewitched, and still remain children in the vanity of their turmoil, wearying and humouring themselves from morning to night, running after stories and fancies, ever busy doing nothing; wonders that the delights of earth and sin can so long entertain and please men, and persuade them to give Jesus Christ so many refusals, to turn from their life and happiness, and choose to be miserable, yea, and take much pains to make themselves miserable. He knows the depravedness and blindness of nature in this; knows it by himself, that once he was so, and therefore wonders not so much at them as they do at him; yet, the unreasonableness and frenzy of that course now appears to him in so strong a light, that he cannot but wonder at these woeful mistakes. But the ungodly wonder far more at him, not knowing the inward cause of his different choice and way. The believer, as we said, is upon the hill; he is going up, and looking back on them in the valley, sees their way tending to, and ending in death, and calls them to retire from it as loud as he can; he tells them the danger, but either they hear not, or understand not his language, or will not believe him: finding present ease and delight in their way, they will not consider and suspect the end of it, but they judge him the fool who will not share with them, and take that way where such multitudes go, and with such ease, and some of them with their train, and horses, and coaches, and all their pomp, while he, and a few straggling poor creatures like him, are climbing up a craggy steep hill, and will by no means come off from that way, and partake of theirs; not knowing

or not believing that at the top of that hill he climbs, is that happy, glorious city, "the New Jerusalem," whereof he is a citizen, and whither he is tending; not believing that he knows the end both of their way and of his own, and therefore would reclaim them if he could, but will by no means "return unto them:" as the Lord commanded the prophet, "Let them return unto thee, but return not thou unto them," Jer. xv. 19.

The world thinks it strange that a Christian can spend so much time in secret prayer, not knowing, nor being able to conceive of the sweetness of the communion with God which he attains in that way. Yea, while he feels it not, how sweet it is, beyond the world's enjoyments, to be but seeking after it, and waiting for it! Oh the delight that there is in the bitterest exercise of repentance, in the very tears, much more in the succeeding harvest of joy! *Incontinentes veræ voluptatis ignari*, says Aristotle: "The intemperate are strangers to true pleasure." It is strange unto a carnal man, to see the child of God disdain the pleasures of sin; he knows not the higher and purer delights and pleasures that the Christian is called to, and of which he hath, it may be, some part at present, but, however, the fulness of them in assured hope.

The strangeness of the world's way to the Christian, and of his to it, though that is somewhat unnatural, yet affects them very differently. He looks on the deluded sinners with pity, they on him with hate. Their part, which is here expressed, of wondering, breaks out in reviling; "they speak evil of you;" and what is their voice? What mean these precise fools? will they readily say. What course is this they take, contrary to all the world? Will they make

a new religion, and condemn all their honest, civil neighbours that are not like them? Ay, forsooth, do all go to hell, think you, except you, and those that follow your way? We are for no more than good fellowship and liberty; and as for so much reading and praying, those are but brain-sick, melancholy conceits: a man may go to heaven like his neighbour, without all this ado. Thus they let fly at their pleasure. But this troubles not the composed Christian's mind at all: while curs snarl and bark about him, the sober traveller goes on his way, and regards them not. He that is acquainted with the way of holiness, can more than endure the counter-blasts and airs of scoffs and revilings; he accounts them his glory and his riches. So Moses "esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt," Heb. xi. 26. And besides many other things to animate, we have this which is here expressed,—

3. The supreme and final judgment. Oh, how full is it! "They shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead"—hath this "in readiness," τῷ ἑτοίμως ἔχοντι, hath the day set; and it shall surely come, though you think it far off.

Though the wicked themselves forget their scoffs against the godly, and though the Christian slights them, and lets them pass, they pass not so; they are all registered, and the great court-day shall call them to account for all these riots and excesses, and withal, for all their reproaches of the godly, who would not run with them in these ways. Tremble, then, ye despisers and mockers of holiness, though you come not near it. What will you do when those you reviled shall appear glorious in your sight, and

their King, the King of saints here, much more glorious, and his glory their joy, and all terror to you? Oh! then, all faces that could look out disdainfully upon religion and the professors of it, shall "gather blackness," and be bathed with shame, and the despised saints of God shall shout so much the more for joy.

You that would rejoice, then, in the appearing of that holy Lord and Judge of the world, let your way be now in holiness. Avoid and hate the common ways of the wicked world; they live in their foolish opinion, and that shall quickly end, but the sentence of that day shall stand for ever.

Ver. 6. For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

It is a thing of prime concernment for a Christian, to be rightly informed, and frequently put in mind, what is the true state and nature of a Christian; for this, the multitude of those who bear that name, either know not, or commonly forget, and so are carried away with the vain fancies and mistakes of the world. The apostle hath characterized Christianity very clearly to us in this place, by that which is the very nature of it, "conformity with Christ," and that which is necessarily consequent upon that, "disconformity with the world." And as the nature and natural properties of things hold universally, those who in all ages are effectually called by the gospel, are thus moulded and framed by it. Thus it was, says the apostle, with your brethren who are now at rest, as many as received the gospel; and for this end was it preached to them, "that they

might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit."

We have here, 1. The preaching of the gospel as the suitable means to a certain end. 2. The express nature of that end.

1. "For for this cause was the gospel preached." There is a particular end, and that very important, for which the preaching of the gospel is intended: this end many consider not, hearing it as if it were to no end, or not propounding a fixed, determined end in their hearing. This, therefore, is to be considered by those who preach this gospel, that they aim aright in it at this end, and at no other,—no self-end. The legal priests were not to be squint-eyed, Lev. xxi. 20, nor must evangelical ministers be thus squinting to base gain, or vain applause. They should also make it their study, to find in themselves this work, this "living to God;" otherwise, they cannot skilfully or faithfully apply their gifts to work this effect on their hearers; and therefore acquaintance with God is most necessary.

How sounds it, to many of us at least, but as a well-contrived story, whose use is to amuse us, and possibly delight us a little, and there is an end,—and indeed no end, for this turns the most serious and most glorious of all messages into an empty sound. If we awake, and give it a hearing, it is much: but for any thing further, how few deeply beforehand consider: I have a dead heart; therefore will I go unto the word of life, that it may be quickened! It is frozen; I will go and lay it before the warm beams of that sun which shines in the gospel. My corruptions are mighty and strong, and grace, if there be any in my heart, is exceedingly weak; but there is in the gospel a power to

weaken and kill sin, and to strengthen grace, and this being the intent of my wise God in appointing it, it shall be my desire and purpose in resorting to it, to find it to me according to his gracious design; to have faith in my Christ, the fountain of my life, more strengthened, and made more active in drawing from him; to have my heart more refined and spiritualized, and to have the sluice of repentance opened, and my affections to Divine things enlarged, more hatred of sin, and more love of God and communion with him.

Ask yourselves concerning former times; and, to take yourselves even now, inquire within, Why came I hither this day? What had I in mine eye and desires this morning ere I came forth, and in my way as I was coming? Did I seriously propound an end, or not; and what was my end? Nor doth the mere custom of mentioning this in prayer, satisfy the question; for this, as other such things usually do in our hand, may turn to a lifeless form, and have no heat of spiritual affection, none of David's panting and breathing after God in his ordinances; such desires as will not be stilled without a measure of attainment, as the child's desire of the breast, as our apostle resembles it, chap. ii. ver. 2.

And then again, being returned home, reflect on your hearts: Much hath been heard, but is there any thing done by it? Have I gained my point? It was not simply to pass a little time that I went, or to pass it with delight in hearing, rejoicing in that light, as they did in St. John Baptist's for a season, [πρὸς ὥραν,] as long as the hour lasts. It was not to have my ear pleased, but my heart changed; not to learn some new notions, and carry them cold in my head, but to be quickened, and purified, and

"renewed in the spirit of my mind." Is this done? Think I now with greater esteem of Christ, and the life of faith, and the happiness of a Christian? And are such thoughts solid and abiding with me? What sin have I left behind? What grace of the Spirit have I brought home? Or what new degree, or, at least, new desire of it, a living desire, that will follow its point? Oh! this were good repetition.

It is a strange folly in multitudes of us, to set ourselves no mark, to propound no end in the hearing of the gospel. The merchant sails not merely that he may sail, but for traffic, and traffics that he may be rich. The husbandman ploughs not merely to keep himself busy with no further end, but ploughs that he may sow, and sows that he may reap with advantage. And shall we do the most excellent and fruitful work fruitlessly, hear only to hear, and look no further? This is indeed a great vanity, and a great misery, to lose that labour, and gain nothing by it, which, duly used, would be of all others most advantageous and gainful: and yet all meetings are full of this!

Now, when you come, it is not simply to hear a discourse, and relish or dislike it in hearing, but a matter of life and death, of eternal death and eternal life; and the spiritual life, begotten and nourished by the word, is the beginning of that eternal life. It follows—

"To them that are dead." By which, I conceive, he intends such as had heard and believed the gospel, when it came to them, and now were dead. And this, I think, he doth to strengthen those brethren to whom he writes; he commends the gospel, to the intent that they might not think the condition and end of it hard; as our Saviour mollifies the matter

of outward sufferings thus, "So persecuted they the prophets that were before you," Matt. v. 12; and the apostle afterwards, in this chapter, uses the same reason in that same subject. So here, that they might not judge the point of mortification he presses so grievous, as naturally men will do, he tells them, it is the constant end of the gospel, and that they who have been saved by it, went that same way he points out to them. They that are dead before you, died in this way that I press on you, before they died; and the gospel was preached to them for that very end.

Men pass away, and others succeed, but the gospel is still the same, hath the same tenor and substance, and the same ends. So Solomon speaks of the heavens and earth, that they remain the same, while "one generation passes, and another cometh," Eccl. i. 4. The gospel surpasses both in its stability, as our Saviour testifies: "They shall pass away, but not one jot of this word," Matt. v. 18. And indeed they wear and wax old, as the apostle teaches us; but the gospel is, from one age to another, of most unalterable integrity, hath still the same vigour and powerful influence as at the first.

They who formerly received the gospel, received it upon these terms; therefore, think it not hard. And they are now dead; all the difficulty of that work of dying to sin, is now over with them. If they had not died *to* their sins by the gospel, they had died *in* them, after a while, and so died eternally. It is therefore a wise prevention, to have sin judged and put to death in us before we die. If we will not part with sin, if we die in it, and with it, we and our sin perish together; but if it die first before us, then we live for ever.

And what thinkest thou of thy carnal will, and all the delights of sin? What is the longest term of its life? Uncertain it is, but most certainly very short; thou and these pleasures must be severed and parted within a little time; however, thou must die, and then they die, and you never meet again. Now, were it not the wisest course to part a little sooner with them, and let them die before thee, that thou mayest inherit eternal life, and eternal delights in it, "pleasures for evermore?" It is the only wise bargain; let us therefore delay it no longer.

This is our season of enjoying the sweetness of the gospel. Others heard it before us in the places which now we fill; and now they are removed, and we must remove shortly, and leave our places to others, to speak and hear in. It is high time we were considering what we do hear, to what end we speak and hear; high time to lay hold on that salvation which is held forth unto us; and that we may lay hold on it, to let go our hold of sin and those perishing things that we hold so firm, and cleave so fast to. Do they that are dead, who heard and obeyed the gospel, now repent of their repentance and mortifying of the flesh? Or rather, do they not think ten thousand times more pains, were it for many ages, all too little for a moment of that which now they enjoy, and shall enjoy to eternity? And they that are dead, who heard the gospel and slighted it, if such a thing might be, what would they give for one of those opportunities which now we daily have, and daily lose, and have no fruit or esteem of them! You have lately seen, at least many of you, and you that shifted the sight, have heard of numbers, cut off in a little time, whole families swept away by the late stroke of God's hand,* many of

* A. D. 1665.

which did think no other but that they might have still been with you here in this place and exercise, at this time, and many years after this. And yet, who hath laid to heart the lengthening out of his day, and considered it more as an opportunity of securing that higher and happier life, than as a little protracting of this wretched life, which is hastening to an end? Oh! therefore be entreated "to-day, while it is called to-day, not to harden your hearts." Though the pestilence doth not now affright you so, yet, that standing mortality, and the decay of these earthen lodges, tell us that shortly we shall cease to preach and hear this gospel. Did we consider, it would excite us to a more earnest search after our evidences of that eternal life that is set before us in the gospel; and we should seek them in the characters of that spiritual life which is the beginning of eternal life within us, and is wrought by the gospel in all the heirs of salvation.

Think therefore wisely of these two things, of what is the proper end of the gospel, and of the approaching end of thy days; and let thy certainty of this latter drive thee to seek more certainty of the former, that thou mayest partake of it: and then, this again will make the thoughts of the other sweet to thee. That visage of death, that is so terrible to unchanged sinners, shall be amiable to thine eye. Having found a life in the gospel as happy and lasting as this is miserable and vanishing, and seeing the perfection of that life on the other side of death, thou wilt long for the passage.

Be more serious in this matter of daily hearing the gospel. Consider why it is sent to thee, and what it brings, and think—It is too long I have slighted its message, and many who have done so

are cut off, and shall hear it no more; I have it once more inviting me, and to me this may be the last invitation. And in these thoughts, ere you come, bow your knee to the Father of spirits, that this one thing may be granted you, that your souls may find at length the lively and mighty power of his Spirit upon yours in the hearing of this gospel, that "you may be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit."

2. Thus is the particular nature of that end expressed. And not to perplex you with various senses, the apostle intends, I conceive, no other than the dying to the world and sin, and living unto God, which is his main subject and scope in the foregoing discourse. That death was before called a "suffering in the flesh," which is in effect the same; and therefore, though the words may be drawn another way, yet it is strange that interpreters have been so far wide of this their genuine and agreeable sense, and that they have been by almost all of them taken in some other import.

"To be judged in the flesh," in the present sense, is to die to sin, or that sin die in us: and, 1. It is thus expressed suitably to the nature of it; it is to the flesh a violent death, and it is according to a sentence judicially pronounced against it. That guilty and miserable life of sin, is in the gospel adjudged to death: there that arrest and sentence is clear and full. See Rom. vi. 6, &c.; viii. 13. That sin must die in order that the soul may live: it must be crucified in us, and we to it, that we may partake of the life of Christ, and of happiness in him. And this is called, "to be judged in the flesh," to have this sentence executed. 2. The thing is the rather spoken of here under the term of being

judged, in counterbalance of that judgment mentioned immediately before, ver. 5, the last judgment of quick and dead, wherein they who would not be thus judged, but mocked and despised those that were, shall fall under a far more terrible judgment, and the sentence of a heavy death indeed, even everlasting death; though they think they shall escape and enjoy liberty in living in sin. And that "to be judged according to men," is, I conceive, added, to signify the connaturalness of the life of sin to a man's now corrupt nature; that men do judge it a death indeed, to be severed and pulled from their sins, and that a cruel death; and the sentence of it in the gospel is a heavy sentence, "a hard saying" to a carnal heart, that he must give up all his sinful delights, must die indeed, in self-denial, must be separated from himself, which is to die, if he will be joined with Christ, and live in him. Thus men judge that they are adjudged to a painful death by the sentence of the gospel. Although it is that they may truly and happily live, yet they understand it not so. They see the death, the parting with sin and all its pleasures; but the life they see not, nor can any know it till they partake of it: it is known to him in whom it exists; it is "hid with Christ in God," Col. iii. 3. And therefore the opposition here is very fitly thus represented, that the death is "according to men in the flesh," but the life is "according to God in the spirit."

As the Christian is adjudged to this death in the flesh by the gospel, so he is looked on and accounted, by carnal men, as dead, for that he enjoys not with them what they esteem their life, and think they could not live without. One that cannot carouse and swear with profane men, is a silly dead creature,

good for nothing; and he that can bear wrongs, and love him that injured him, is a poor spiritless fool, hath no mettle or life in him, in the world's account. Thus is he "judged according to men in the flesh,"—he is as a dead man, "but lives according to God in the spirit;" dead to men, and alive to God, as ver. 2.

Now, if this life be in thee, it will act. All life is in motion, and is called an act, but most active of all is this most excellent, and, as I may call it, most lively life. It will be moving towards God, often seeking to him, making still towards him as its principle and fountain, exerting itself in holy and affectionate thoughts of him; sometimes on one of his sweet attributes, sometimes on another, as the bee amongst the flowers. And as it will thus act within, so it will be outwardly laying hold on all occasions, yea, seeking out ways and opportunities to be serviceable to thy Lord; employing all for him, commending and extolling his goodness, doing and suffering cheerfully for him, laying out the strength of desires, and parts, and means, in thy station, to gain him glory. If thou be alone, then not esteeming thyself alone, but with him, seeking to know more of him, and to be made more like him. If in company, then casting about how to bring His name into esteem, and to draw others to a love of religion and holiness, by speeches, as it may be fit, and most by the true behaviour of thy carriage;—tender over the souls of others, to do them good to thy utmost; thinking each day being lost, when thou art not busy for the honour and advantage of him to whom thou now livest;—thinking in the morning, Now what may I do this day for my God? How may I most please and

glorify him, and use my strength, and understanding, and my whole self, as not mine, but his? And then, in the evening, reflecting, O Lord, have I seconded these thoughts in reality? What glory hast thou had by me this day? Whither went my thoughts and endeavours? What busied them most? Have I been much with God? Have I adorned the gospel in my converse with others?—And if thou findest any thing done this way, this life will engage thee to bless and acknowledge him, the spring and worker of it. If thou hast stepped aside, were it but to "an appearance of evil," or if any fit season of good hath escaped thee unprofitably, it will lead thee to check thyself, and to be grieved for thy sloth and coldness, and to see if more love would not beget more diligence.

Try it by sympathy and antipathy, which follow the nature of things: as we see in some plants and creatures that cannot grow, cannot agree together, and others that do favour and benefit mutually. If thy soul hath an aversion and reluctance against whatever is contrary to holiness, it is an evidence of this new nature and life; thy heart rises against wicked ways and speeches, oaths and cursings, and rotten communication; yea, thou canst not endure unworthy discourses, wherein most spend their time; thou findest no relish in the unsavoury society of such as know not God, canst not "sit with vain persons," but findest a delight in those who have the image of God upon them, such as partake of that Divine life, and carry the evidences of it in their carriage. David did not disdain the fellowship of the saints, and that it was no disparagement to him, is implied in the name he gives them, Psa. xvi. 3, "the excellent ones," the magnific or noble,

adiri: that word is taken from one that signifies a robe or noble garment, *adereth, toga magnifica;* so he thought them nobles and kings as well as he; they had robes royal, and therefore were fit companions of kings. A spiritual eye looks upon spiritual dignity, and esteems and loves them who are "born of God," how low soever be their natural birth and breeding. The sons of God have of his Spirit in them, and are born to the same inheritance, where all shall have enough, and they are tending homewards by the conduct of the same Spirit that is in them; so that there must be amongst them a real complacency and delight in one another.

And then, consider the temper of thy heart towards spiritual things, the word and ordinances of God, whether thou dost esteem highly of them, and delight in them; whether there be compliance of the heart with Divine truths, something in thee that suits and sides with them against thy corruptions; whether in thy affliction thou seekest not to the puddles of earthly comforts, but hast thy recourse to the sweet crystal streams of the Divine promises, and findest refreshment in them. It may be, at some times, in a spiritual distemper, holy exercises and ordinances will not have that present sensible sweetness to a Christian, that he desires; and some will for a long time lie under dryness and deadness this way; yet, there is here an evidence of this spiritual life, that thou stayest by thy Lord, and reliest on him, and wilt not leave these holy means, how sapless soever to thy sense for the present. Thou findest for a long time little sweetness in prayer, yet thou prayest still, and, when thou canst say nothing, yet offerest at it, and lookest towards Christ thy life. Thou dost not turn away from

these things to seek consolation elsewhere, but as thou knowest that life is in Christ, thou wilt stay till he refresh thee with new and lively influence. It is not any where but in him; as St. Peter said, "Lord, to whom should we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life," John vi. 68.

Consider with thyself, whether thou hast any knowledge of the growth or deficiencies of this spiritual life; for it is here but begun, and breathes in an air contrary to it, and lodges in a house that often smokes and darkens it. Canst thou go on in formal performances, from one year to another, and make no advancement in the inward exercises of grace? and restest thou content with that? It is no good sign. But art thou either gaining victories over sin, and further strength of faith and love, and other graces, or, at least, art thou earnestly seeking these, and bewailing thy wants and disappointments of this kind? Then thou livest. At the worst, wouldst thou rather grow this way, be further off from sin, and nearer God, than grow in thy estate, or credit, or honours? Esteemest thou more highly of grace than of the whole world? There is life at the root; although thou findest not that flourishing thou desirest, yet, the desire of it is life in thee. And, if growing this way, art thou content, whatsoever is thy outward estate? Canst thou solace thyself in the love and goodness of thy God, though the world frown on thee? Art thou unable to take comfort in the smiles of the world, when his face is hid? This tells thee thou livest, and that he is thy life.

Although many Christians have not so much sensible joy, yet they account spiritual joy and the light of God's countenance the only true joy, and all

other without it, madness; and they cry, and sigh, and wait for it. Meanwhile, not only duty and the hopes of attaining a better state of religion, but even love to God, makes them to do so, to serve and please, and glorify him to their utmost. And this is not a dead resting without God, but it is a stable compliance with his will in the highest point; waiting for him, and living by faith, which is most acceptable to him. In a word, whether in sensible comfort, or without it, still this is the fixed thought of a believing soul, "It is good for me to draw nigh to God," Psa. lxxiii. 28,—only good; and it will not live in a willing estrangedness from him, what way soever he is pleased to deal with it.

Now, for the entertaining and strengthening of this life, which is the great business and care of all that have it,—

1. Beware of omitting and interrupting those spiritual means which do provide it and nourish it. Little neglects of that kind will draw on greater, and great neglects will make great abatements of vigour and liveliness. Take heed of using holy things coldly and lazily, without affection: that will make them fruitless, and our life will not be advantaged by them, unless they be used in a lively way. Be active in all good within thy reach: as this is a sign of the spiritual life, so it is a helper and friend to it. A slothful, unstirring life, will make a sickly, unhealthful life. Motion purifies and sharpens the spirits, and makes men robust and vigorous.

2. Beware of admitting a correspondence with any sin; yea, do not so much as discourse familiarly with it, or look kindly toward it; for that will undoubtedly cast a damp upon thy spirit, and

diminish thy graces at least, and will obstruct thy communion with God. Thou knowest, thou who hast any knowledge of this life, that thou canst not go to him with that sweet freedom thou wert wont, after thou hast been but tampering or parleying with any of thy old loves. Oh! do not make so foolish a bargain, as to prejudice the least of thy spiritual comforts, for the greatest and longest continued enjoyments of sin, which are base, and but for a season.

But wouldst thou grow upwards in this life? 3. Have much recourse to Jesus Christ thy Head, the spring from whom flow the animal spirits that quicken thy soul. Wouldst thou know more of God? He it is who "reveals the Father," and reveals him as "his Father," and, in him, "thy Father;" and that is the sweet notion of God. Wouldst thou overcome thy lusts further? Our victory is in him. Apply his conquest; "we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us," Rom. viii. 37. Wouldst thou be more replenished with graces and spiritual affections? His fulness is, for that use, open to us; there is life, and more life, in him, and for us. This was his business here. He came, "that we might have life, and might have it more abundantly," John x. 10.

Ver. 7. But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.

The heart of a real Christian is really taken off from the world, and set heavenwards; yet, there is still in this flesh, so much of the flesh hanging to it, as will readily poise all downwards, unless it be often wound up and put in remembrance of those things that will raise it still to further spirituality.

This the apostle doth in this Epistle, and particularly in these words, in which three things are to be considered. I. A threefold duty recommended. II. The mutual relation that binds these duties to one another. III. The reason here used to bind them upon a Christian.

I. A threefold duty recommended, sobriety, watchfulness, and prayer; and of the three, the last is evidently the chief, and is here so meant, the others being recommended, as suitable and subservient to it; therefore I shall speak first of prayer.

And truly, to speak and to hear of this duty often, were our hearts truly and entirely acquainted with it, would have still new sweetness and usefulness in it. Oh, how great were the advantage of that lively knowledge of it, beyond the exactest skill in defining it, and in discoursing on the heads of doctrine concerning it!

Prayer is not a smooth expression, or a well-contrived form of words; not the product of a ready memory, or of a rich invention exerting itself in the performance. These may draw a neat picture of it, but still, the life is wanting. The motion of the heart God-wards, holy and Divine affection, makes prayer real, and lively, and acceptable to the living God, to whom it is presented; the pouring out of thy heart to him who made it, and therefore hears it, and understands what it speaks, and how it is moved and affected in calling on him. It is not the gilded paper and good writing of a petition, that prevails with a king, but the moving sense of it. And to that King who discerns the heart, heart-sense is the sense of all, and that which only he regards: he listens to hear what that speaks, and takes all as nothing where that is silent. All other excellence

in prayer, is but the outside and fashion of it; this is the life of it.

Though prayer, precisely taken, is only petition, yet, in its fuller and usual sense, it comprehends the venting of our humble sense of vileness and sin, in sincere confession, and the extolling and praising of the holy name of our God, his excellency and goodness, with thankful acknowledgment of received mercies. Of these sweet ingredient perfumes is the incense of prayer composed, and by the Divine fire of love it ascends unto God, the heart and all with it; and when the hearts of the saints unite in joint prayer, the pillar of sweet smoke goes up the greater and the fuller. Thus says that song of the spouse: "Going up from the wilderness, as pillars of smoke perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, and all the powders of the merchant," Cant. iii. 6. The word there (Timeroth, from Temer, a palm-tree) signifies straight pillars, like the tallest, straightest kind of trees. And, indeed, the sincerity and unfeignedness of prayer makes it go up as a straight pillar, no crookedness in it, tending straight towards heaven, and bowing to no side by the way. Oh! the single and fixed viewing of God, as it, in other ways, is the thing which makes all holy and sweet, so particularly does it in this Divine work of prayer.

It is true we have to deal with a God who of himself needs not this our pains, either to inform or to excite him: he fully knows our thoughts before we express them, and our wants before we feel them or think of them. Nor doth this affection and gracious bent to do his children good, wax remiss, or admit of the least abatement and forgetfulness of them.

But, instead of necessity on the part of God, which cannot be imagined, we shall find that equity,

and that singular dignity and utility of it, on our part, which cannot be denied.

1. Equity. That thus the creature signify his homage to and dependence on his Creator, for his being and well-being; that he take all the good he enjoys or expects, from that Sovereign Good, declaring himself unworthy, waiting for all upon the terms of free goodness, and acknowledging all to flow from that spring.

2. Dignity. Man was made for communion with God his Maker; it is the excellence of his nature to be capable of this end, the happiness of it to be raised to enjoy it. Now, in nothing more in this life, is this communion actually and highly enjoyed, than in the exercise of prayer; in that he may freely impart his affairs, and estate, and wants, to God, as the most faithful and powerful Friend, the richest and most loving Father; may use the liberty of a child, telling his Father what he stands in need of and desires, and communing with him with humble confidence, being admitted so frequently into the presence of so great a King.

3. The utility of it.

(1.) Prayer eases the soul in times of distress, when it is oppressed with griefs and fears, by giving them vent, and that in so advantageous a way, emptying them into the bosom of God. The very vent, were it but into the air, gives ease; or speak your grief to a statue rather than smother it; much more ease does it give to pour it forth into the lap of a confidential and sympathizing friend, even though unable to help us; yet still more of one who can help; and, of all friends, our God is, beyond all comparison, the surest, and most affectionate, and most powerful. So Isa. lxiii. 9, both compassion and effectual salvation are expressed: "In all

their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old." And so, resting on his love, power, and gracious promises, the soul quiets itself in God upon this assurance, that it is not in vain to seek him, and that he "despiseth not the sighing of the poor," Psa. xii. 5.

(2.) The soul is more spiritually affected with its own condition, by laying it open before the Lord; becomes more deeply sensible of sin, and ashamed in his sight, in confessing it before him; more dilated and enlarged to receive the mercies sued for, as the "opening wide of the mouth" of the soul, that it "may be filled;" more disposed to observe the Lord in answering, and to bless him, and trust on him, upon the renewed experiences of his regard to its distresses and desires.

(3.) All the graces of the Spirit are, in prayer, stirred and exercised, and by exercise, strengthened and increased; faith, in applying the Divine promises, which are the very ground that the soul goes upon to God, hope looking out to their performance, and love particularly expressing itself in that sweet converse, and delighting in it, as love doth in the company of the person beloved, thinking all hours too short in speaking with him. Oh, how the soul is refreshed with freedom of speech with its beloved Lord! And as it delights in that, so it is continually advanced and grows by each meeting and conference, beholding the excellency of God, and relishing the pure and sublime pleasures that are to be found in near communion with him. Looking upon the Father in the face of Christ, and using him as a Mediator in prayer, as still it must, it is

drawn to further admiration of that bottomless love, which found out that way of agreement, that "new and living way" of our access, when all was shut up, and we must otherwise have been shut out for ever. And then, the affectionate expressions of that reflex love, seeking to find that vent in prayer, do kindle higher, and being as it were fanned and blown up, rise to a greater, and higher, and purer flame, and so tend upwards the more strongly. David, as he doth profess his love to God in prayer, in his psalms, so no doubt it grew in the expressing; "I will love thee, O Lord my strength," Psa. xviii. 1. And in Psa. cxvi. 1, he doth raise an incentive of love out of this very consideration of the correspondence of prayer—"I love the Lord because he hath heard;" and he resolves thereafter upon persistance in that course; "therefore will I call upon him as long as I live." And as the graces of the Spirit are advanced in prayer by their actings, so for this further reason, because prayer sets the soul particularly near unto God in Jesus Christ. It is then in his presence, and being much with God in this way, it is powerfully assimilated to him by converse with him; as we readily contract the habits of those with whom we have much intercourse, especially if they be such as we singularly love and respect. Thus the soul is moulded further to the likeness of God, is stamped with clearer characters of him, by being much with him, becomes more like God, more holy and spiritual, and, like Moses, brings back a bright shining from the mount.

(4.) And not only thus, by a natural influence, doth prayer work this advantage, but even by a federal efficacy, suing for, and upon suit obtaining, supplies of grace as the chief good, and besides, all

other needful mercies. It is a real means of receiving. "Whatsoever you shall ask, that will I do," says our Saviour, John xiv. 13. God, having established this intercourse, has engaged his truth and goodness in it, that if they call on him, they shall be heard and answered. If they prepare the heart to call, he will incline his ear to hear. Our Saviour hath assured us, that we may build upon his goodness, upon the affection of a father in him; "He will give good things to them that ask," says one evangelist, Matt. vii. 11,—"give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him," says another, Luke xi. 13, as being *the good*, indeed the highest of gifts and the sum of all good things, and that for which his children are most earnest supplicants. Prayer for grace doth, as it were, set the mouth of the soul to the spring, draws from Jesus Christ, and is replenished out of his fulness, thirsting after it, and drawing from it that way.

And for this reason it is that our Saviour, and from him, and according to his example, the apostles, recommend prayer so much. "Watch and pray," says our Saviour, Matt. xxvi. 41; and St. Paul, "Pray continually," 1 Thess. v. 17. And our apostle here particularly specifies this, as the grand means of attaining that conformity with Christ which he presses: this is the highway to it, "Be sober, and watch unto prayer." He that is much in prayer, shall grow rich in grace. He shall thrive and increase most, who is busiest in this, which is our very traffic with heaven, and fetches the most precious commodities thence. He who sends oftenest out these ships of "desire," who makes the most voyages to that land of spices and pearls, shall

be sure to improve his stock most, and have most of heaven upon earth.

But the true art of this trading is very rare. Every trade hath something wherein the skill of it lies; but this is deep and supernatural, is not reached by human industry. Industry is to be used in it, but we must know the faculty of it comes from above, that spirit of prayer, without which learning, and wit, and religious breeding can do nothing. Therefore, this is to be our prayer often, our great suit, for the spirit of prayer, that we may speak the language of the sons of God by the Spirit of God, which alone teaches the heart to pronounce aright those things that the tongue of many hypocrites can articulate well to man's ear. Only the children, in that right strain that takes him, call God their *Father*, and cry unto him as their Father; and therefore, many a poor unlettered Christian far outstrips your school-rabbies in this faculty, because it is not effectually taught in those lower academies. They must be in God's own school, children of his house, who speak this language. Men may give spiritual rules and directions in this, and such as may be useful, drawn from the word that furnishes us with all needful precepts; but you have still to bring these into the seat of this faculty of prayer, the heart, and stamp them upon it, and so to teach it to pray, without which there is no prayer. This is the prerogative royal of him who framed the heart of man within him.

But for advancing in this, and growing more skilful in it, prayer is, with continual dependence on the Spirit, to be much used. Praying much, thou shalt be blest with much faculty for it. So then,

askest thou, What shall I do that I may learn to pray? There are things here to be considered, which are expressed as serving this end; but for the present take this, and chiefly this, By praying, thou shalt learn to pray.—Thou shalt both obtain more of the Spirit, and find more of the cheerful working of it in prayer, when thou puttest it often to that work for which it is received, and wherein it takes delight. And, as both advantaging all other graces, and promoting the grace of prayer itself, this frequency and abounding in prayer is here very clearly intended, in that the apostle makes it as the main of the work we have to do, and would have us keep our hearts in a constant aptness for it: "Be sober and watch"—to what end?—"unto prayer."

"Be sober." They that have no better, must make the best they can of carnal delights. It is no wonder they take as large a share of them as they can bear, and sometimes more. But the Christian is called to a more excellent state, and higher pleasures; so that he may behold men glutting themselves with these base things, and be as little moved to share with them, as men are taken with the pleasure a swine hath in wallowing in the mire.

It becomes the heirs of heaven to be far above the love of the earth, and in the necessary use of any earthly things, still to keep within the due measure of their use, and to keep their hearts wholly disengaged from an excessive affection to them. This is the sobriety to which we are here exhorted.

It is true, that in the most common sense of the word, it is very commendable, and it is fit to be so considered by a Christian, that he flee gross intemperance, as a thing most contrary to his condition and holy calling, and wholly inconsistent with the

spiritual temper of a renewed mind, with those exercises to which it is called, and with its progress in its way homewards. It is a most unseemly sight, to behold one simply by outward profession a Christian, overtaken with surfeiting and drunkenness, much more, given to the vile custom of it. All sensual delights, even the filthy lust of uncleanness, go under the common name of insobriety, intemperance, ἀκολασία: and they all degrade and destroy the noble soul, being unworthy of a man, much more of a Christian; and the contempt of them preserves the soul, and elevates it.

But the sobriety here recommended, though it takes in that too, yet reaches further than temperance in meat and drink. It is the spiritual temperance of a Christian mind in all earthly things, as our Saviour joins these together, Luke xxi. 34, "surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life:" and under the "cares" are comprehended all the excessive desires and delights of this life, which cannot be followed and attended without distempered carefulness.

Many who are sober men and of temperate diet, yet are spiritually intemperate, drunk with pride, or covetousness, or passion; drunk with self-love, and love of their pleasures and ease, with love of the world and the things of it, which cannot consist with the love of God, as St. John tells us, 1 John ii. 15; drunk with the inordinate, unlawful love even of their lawful calling and the lawful gain they pursue by it. Their hearts are still going after it, and so, reeling to and fro, never fixed on God and heavenly things, but either hurried up and down with incessant business, or, if sometimes at ease, it is as the ease of a drunken man, not composed to better and

wiser thoughts, but falling into a dead sleep, contrary to the watching here joined with sobriety.

"Watch." There is a Christian rule to be observed in the very moderating of bodily sleep, and that particularly for the interest of prayer; but watching as well as sobriety, here, implies chiefly the spiritual circumspectness and vigilance of the mind, in a wary, waking posture, that it be not surprised by the assaults or sleights of Satan, by the world, nor by its nearest and most deceiving enemy, the corruption that dwells within, which being so near, doth most readily watch unperceived advantages, and easily circumvent us, Heb. xii. 1. The soul of a Christian being surrounded with enemies, both of so great power and wrath, and so watchful to undo it, should it not be watchful for its own safety, and live in a military vigilance continually, keeping constant watch and sentinel, and suffering nothing to pass that may carry the least suspicion of danger? Should he not be distrustful and jealous of all the motions of his own heart, and the smilings of the world? And in relation to these, it will be a wise course to take that word as a good caveat, Νῆφε καὶ μέμνησε ἀπιστεῖν. "Be watchful, and remember to mistrust." Under the garment of some harmless pleasure, or some lawful liberties, may be conveyed into thy soul some thief or traitor, that will either betray thee to the enemy, or at least pilfer and steal of the most precious things thou hast. Do we not by experience find, how easily our foolish hearts are seduced and deceived, and therefore apt to deceive themselves? And by things that seem to have no evil in them, they are yet drawn from the height of affection to their Supreme Good, and from communion with God, and study to

please him; which should not be intermitted, for then it will abate, whereas it ought still to be growing.

Now, II. The mutual relation of these duties is clear: they are each of them assistant and helpful to the other, and are in their nature inseparably linked together, as they are here in the words of the apostle; "sobriety," the friend of "watchfulness," and "prayer," of both. Intemperance doth of necessity draw on sleep: excessive eating and drinking, by sending up too many, and such gross vapours, surcharge the brain: and when the body is thus deadened, how unfit is it for any active employment! Thus the mind, by a surcharge of delights, or desires, or cares of earth, is made so heavy and dull, that it cannot awake; hath not the spiritual activity and clearness that spiritual exercises, particularly prayer, do require. Yea, as bodily insobriety, full feeding and drinking, not only for the time indisposes to action, but, by the custom of it, brings the body to so gross and heavy a temper, that the very natural spirits cannot stir to and fro in it with freedom, but are clogged and stick as the wheels of a coach in a deep miry way; thus is it with the soul glutted with earthly things: the affections bemired with them, make it sluggish and inactive in spiritual things, and render the motions of the spirit heavy; and, obstructed thus, the soul grows carnally secure and sleepy, and prayer comes heavily off. But when the affections are soberly exercised, and even in lawful things have not full liberty, with the reins laid on their necks, to follow the world and carnal projects and delights; when the unavoidable affairs of this life are done with a spiritual mind, a heart kept free and disengaged; then is the soul more nimble for

spiritual things, for Divine meditation and prayer: it can watch and continue in these things, and spend itself in that excellent way with more alacrity.

Again, as this sobriety, and the watchful temper attending it, enable for prayer, so prayer preserves these. Prayer winds up the soul from the earth, raises it above those things which intemperance feeds on, acquaints it with the transcending sweetness of Divine comforts, the love and loveliness of Jesus Christ; and these most powerfully wean the soul from the low creeping pleasures that the world gapes after and swallows with such greediness. He that is admitted to nearest intimacy with the king, and is called daily to his presence, not only in the view and company of others, but likewise in secret, will he be so mad as to sit down and drink with the kitchen-boys, or the common guards, so far below what he may enjoy? Surely not.

Prayer, being our near communion with the great God, certainly sublimates the soul, and makes it look down upon the base ways of the world with disdain, and despise the truly besotting pleasures of it. Yea, the Lord doth sometimes fill those souls that converse much with him, with such beatific delights, such inebriating sweetness, as I may call it, that it is, in a happy manner, drunk with these; and the more there is of this, the more is the soul above base intemperance in the use of the delights of the world. Whereas common drunkenness makes a man less than a man, this makes him more than a man: that sinks him below himself, makes him a beast; this raises him above himself, and makes him an angel.

Would you, as surely you ought, have much faculty for prayer, and be frequent in it, and

experience much of the pure sweetness of it? Then, deny yourselves more the muddy pleasures and sweetness of the world. If you would pray much, and with much advantage, then "be sober, and watch unto prayer." Suffer not your hearts to long so after ease, and wealth, and esteem in the world: these will make your hearts, if they mix with them, become like them, and take their quality; will make them gross and earthly, and unable to mount up; will clog the wings of prayer, and you shall find the loss, when your soul is heavy and drowsy, and falls off from delighting in God and your communion with him. Will such things as those you follow be able to countervail your damage? Can they speak you peace, and uphold you in a day of darkness and distress? Or may it not be such now, as will make them all a burden and vexation to you? But, on the other hand, the more you abate and let go of these, and come empty and hungry to God in prayer, the more room shall you have for his consolations; and therefore, the more plentifully will he pour in of them, and enrich your soul with them the more, the less you take in of the other.

Again, would you have yourselves raised to, and continued and advanced in a spiritual heavenly temper, free from the surfeits of earth, and awake and active for heaven? Be incessant in prayer.

But thou wilt say, I find nothing but heavy indisposedness in it, nothing but roving and vanity of heart, and so, though I have used it some time, it is still unprofitable and uncomfortable to me.—Although it be so, yet, hold on, give it not over. Or need I say this to thee? Though it were referred to thyself, wouldst thou forsake it, and leave off? Then what wouldst thou do next? For if there be no

comfort in it, far less is there any for thee in any other way. If temptation should so far prevail with thee as to lead thee to try intermission, either thou wouldst be forced to return to it presently, or certainly wouldst fall into a more grievous condition, and, after horrors and lashings, must at length come back to it again, or perish for ever. Therefore, however it go, continue praying. Strive to believe that love thou canst not see; for where sight is abridged, there it is proper for faith to work. If thou canst do no more, lie before thy Lord, and look to him, and say, Lord, here I am, thou mayest quicken and revive me if thou wilt, and I trust thou wilt; but if I must do it, I will die at thy feet. My life is in thy hand, and thou art goodness and mercy; while I have breath, I will cry, or, if I cannot cry, yet I will wait on and look to thee.

One thing forget not, that the ready way to rise out of this sad, yet safe state, is, to be much in viewing the Mediator, and interposing him betwixt the Father's view and thy soul. Some who do orthodoxly believe this to be right, yet, as often befalls us in other things of this kind, do not so consider and use it in their necessity, as becomes them, and therefore fall short of comfort. He hath declared it, "No man cometh to the Father but by me." How vile soever thou art, put thyself under his robe, and into his hand, and he will lead thee unto the Father, and present thee acceptable and blameless; and the Father shall receive thee, and declare himself well pleased with thee in his well-beloved Son, who hath covered thee with his righteousness, and brought thee so clothed, and set thee before him.

III. The third thing we have to consider, is, the

reason which binds on us these duties: "The end of all things is at hand."

We need often to be reminded of this, for even believers too readily forget it; and it is very suitable to the apostle's foregoing discourse of judgment, and to his present exhortation to sobriety and watchfulness unto prayer. Even the general end of all is "at hand;" though, since the apostle wrote this, many ages are past. For, 1. The apostles usually speak of the whole time after the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh, as "the last time," for that two double chiliads * of years passed before it, the one before, the other under the law; and in this third, it is conceived, shall be the end of all things. And the apostles seem, by divers expressions, to have apprehended it in their days to be not far off. So. St. Paul, 1 Thess. iv. 17, "We which are alive, and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds,"—speaking as if it were not impossible that it might come in their time; which put him upon some explication of that correction of their mistakes, in his next Epistle to them, wherein, notwithstanding, he seems not to assert any great tract of time to intervene, but only that in that time great things were first to come. 2. However, this might always have been said: in respect of succeeding eternity, the whole duration of the world is not considerable; and to the eternal Lord who made it, and hath appointed its period, "a thousand years are but as one day." We think a thousand years a great matter, in respect of our short life, and more so through our shortsightedness, who look not through this to eternal life; but what is the utmost length of

* A chiliad is a thousand years.—*Ed.*

time, were it millions of years, to a thought of eternity? We find much room in this earth, but to the vast heavens it is but as a point. Thus, that which is but small to us, a field or little enclosure, a fly, had it skill, would divide into provinces in proportion to itself. 3. To each man, the "end of all things" is, even after our measure, "at hand;" for when he dies, the world ends for him. Now this consideration fits the subject, and presses it strongly. Seeing all things shall be quickly at an end, even the frame of heaven and earth, why should we, knowing this, and having higher hopes, lay out so much of our desires and endeavours upon those things, that are posting to ruin? It is no hard notion, to be sober and watchful to prayer, to be trading that way, and seeking higher things, and to be very moderate in these, which are of so short a date. As in themselves and their utmost term, they are of short duration, so more evidently to each of us in particular, who are so "soon cut off, and flee away." Why should our hearts cleave to those things from which we shall so quickly part, and from which, if we will not freely part and let them go, we shall be pulled away, and pulled with the more pain, the closer we cleave, and the faster we are glued to them?

This the apostle St. Paul casts in seasonably, though many think it not seasonable at such times, when he is discoursing of a great point of our life, marriage, to work Christian minds to a holy freedom both ways, whether they use it or not; not to view it, nor any thing here, with the world's spectacles, which make it look so big and so fixed, but to see it in the stream of time as passing by, and as no such great matter, 1 Cor. vii. 31. The fashion of this

world passeth away παράγει, as a pageant or show in a street, going through, and quickly out of sight. What became of all the marriage solemnities of kings and princes of former ages, which they were so taken up with in their time? When we read of them described in history, they are as a night dream, or a day fancy, which passes through the mind, and vanishes.

Oh! foolish man, that hunteth such poor things, and will not be called off till death benight him, and he finds his great work not done, yea, not begun, nor even seriously thought of. Your buildings, your trading, your lands, your matches, and friendships, and projects, when they take with you, and your hearts are after them, say, But for how long are all these? "Their end is at hand; therefore be sober, and watch unto prayer." Learn to divide better; more hours for prayer, and fewer for them; your whole heart for it, and none of it for them. Seeing they will fail you so quickly, prevent them; become free: lean not on them till they break, and you fall into the pit.

It is reported of one, that, hearing the fifth chapter of Genesis read, so long lives, and yet, the burden still, "they died"—Seth lived nine hundred and twelve years, "and he died;" Enos lived nine hundred and five years, "and he died;" Methuselah nine hundred and sixty-nine years, "and he died;"—he took so deeply the thought of death and eternity, that it changed his whole frame, and turned him from a voluptuous, to a most strict and pious course of life. How small a word will do much, when God sets it into the heart! But surely, this one thing would make the soul more calm and sober in the pursuit of present things, if their term were truly

computed and considered. How soon shall youth, and health, and carnal delights be at an end! How soon shall state-craft and king-craft, and all the great projects of the highest wits and spirits, be laid in the dust! This casts a damp upon all those fine things. But to a soul acquainted with God, and in affection removed hence already, no thought so sweet as this. It helps much to carry it cheerfully through wrestlings and difficulties, through better and worse; they see land near, and shall quickly be at home: that is the way. "The end of all things is at hand;" an end of a few poor delights, and the many vexations of this wretched life; an end of temptations and sins, the worst of all evils; yea, an end of the imperfect fashion of our best things here, an end of prayer itself, to which succeeds that new song of endless praises.

Ver. 8. And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

The graces of the Spirit are an entire frame, making up the new creature, and none of them can be wanting; therefore the doctrine and exhortation of the apostles speak of them usually, not only as inseparable, but as one. But there is, amongst them all, none more comprehensive than this of "love," insomuch that St. Paul calls it "the fulfilling of the law," Rom. xiii. 10. Love to God is the sum of all relative to him, and so likewise is it towards our brethren. Love to God is that which makes us live to him, and be wholly his; that which most powerfully weans us from this world, and causeth us delight in communion with him in holy meditation and prayer. Now the apostle, adding here the duty

of Christians to one another, gives this as the prime, yea, the sum of all; "Above all, have fervent love."

Concerning this, consider, I. The nature of it. II. The eminent degree of it. And, III. The excellent fruit of it.

I. The nature of this love. 1. It is a union, therefore called a bond or chain, that links things together. 2. It is not a mere external union, that holds in customs, or words, or outward carriage, but a union of hearts. 3. It is here not a natural, but a spiritual, supernatural union: it is the mutual love of Christians "as brethren." There is a common benevolence and good-will due to all; but a more particular uniting affection amongst Christians, which makes them interchangeably one.

The devil being an apostate spirit, revolted and separated from God, doth naturally project and work division. This was his first exploit, and it is still his grand design and business in the world. He first divided man from God; put them at an enmity by the first sin of our first parents; and the next we read of in their first child, was enmity against his brother. So, Satan is called by our Saviour, justly, "a liar and a murderer from the beginning," John viii. 44; he murdered man by lying, and made him a murderer.

And as the devil's work is division, Christ's work is union. He came to dissolve the works of the devil, ἵνα λύσῃ, by a contrary work, 1 John iii. 8. He came to make all friends; to re-collect and reunite all men to God, and man to man. And both those unions hold in him by virtue of that marvellous union of natures in his person, and that mysterious union of the persons of believers with him as

their Head. So the word ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι signifies, "To unite all in one head," Eph. i. 10.

This was his great project in all; this he died and suffered for, and this he prayed for, John xvii.; and this is strong above all ties, natural or civil, Union in Christ. This they have who are indeed Christians; this they would pretend to have, if they understood it, who profess themselves Christians. If natural friendship be capable of that expression, "one spirit in two bodies," Christian union hath it much more really and properly; for there is, indeed, one spirit more extensive in all the faithful, yea, so one spirit, that it makes them up into one body more extensive. They are not so much as divers bodies, only divers "members of one body."

Now, this love of our brethren is not another from the love of God; it is but the streaming forth of it, or the reflection of it. Jesus Christ sending his Spirit into the heart, unites it to God in himself by love, which is indeed all, that "loving of God" supremely and entirely, with all the mind and soul, all the combined strength of the heart! And then, that same love, first wholly carried to him, is not divided or impaired by the love of our brethren, but is dilated, as derived from the other. God allows, yea, commands, yea, causes, that it stream forth, and act itself toward them, remaining still in him, as in its source and centre; beginning at him, and returning to him, as the beams that diffuse themselves from the sun, and the light and heat, yet are not divided or cut off from it, but remain in it, and, by emanation, issue from it. In loving our brethren in God, and for him, not only because he commands us to love them, and so the law of love to him ties us to it, as his will; but because that

love of God doth naturally extend itself thus, and act thus; in loving our brethren after a spiritual, Christian manner, we do, even in that, love our God.

Loving of God makes us one with God, and so gives us an impression of his Divine bounty in his Spirit. And his love, the proper work of his Spirit, dwelling in the heart, enlarges and dilates it, as self-love contracts and straitens it: so that as self-love is the perfect opposite to the love of God, it is likewise so to brotherly love; it shuts out and undoes both; and where the love of God is rekindled and enters the heart, it destroys and burns up self-love, and so carries the affection up to himself, and in him forth to our brethren.

This is that bitter root of all enmity in man against God, and, amongst men, against one another, *self*, man's heart turned from God towards himself; and the very work of renewing grace is, to annul and destroy self, to replace God in his right, that the heart, and all its affections and motions, may be at his disposal; so that, instead of self-will and self-love, which ruled before, now, the will of God, and the love of God, command all.

And where it is thus, there this φιλαδελφία, this love of our brethren, will be sincere. Whence is it that wars, and contests, and mutual disgracings and despisings, do so much abound, but that men love themselves, and nothing but themselves, or in relation to themselves, as it pleases, or is advantageous to them? That is the standard and rule. All is carried by interest, so thence are strifes, and defamings, and bitterness against one another. But the Spirit of Christ coming in, undoes all selfishness. And now, what is according to God, what he wills and loves, that is law, and a powerful law, so written

on the heart, this law of love, that it obeys, not unpleasantly, but with delight, and knows no constraint but the sweet constraint of love. To forgive a wrong, to love even thine enemy for him, is not only feasible now, but delectable, although a little while ago thou thoughtest it was quite impossible.

That Spirit of Christ, which is all sweetness and love, so calms and composes the heart, that peace with God, and that unspeakably blessed correspondence of love with him, do so fill the soul with lovingness and sweetness, that it can breathe nothing else. It hates nothing but sin, it pities the sinner, and carries towards the worst that love of good-will, desiring their return and salvation. But as for those in whom appears the image of their Father, their heart cleaves to them as brethren indeed. No natural advantages of birth, of beauty, or of wit, draw a Christian's love so much, as the resemblance of Christ; wherever that is found, it is comely and lovely to a soul that loves him.

Much communion with God sweetens and calms the mind, cures the distempers of passion and pride, which are the avowed enemies of love. Particularly, prayer and love suit well.

1. Prayer disposes to this love. "He that loveth not, knoweth not God," saith the beloved apostle, "for God is love," 1 John iv. 3. He that is most conversant with love in the spring of it, where it is purest and fullest, cannot but have the fullest measure of it, flowing in from thence into his heart, and flowing forth from thence unto his brethren. If they who use the society of mild and good men, are insensibly assimilated to them, grow like them, and contract somewhat of their temper; much more doth familiar walking with God powerfully trans-

form the soul into his likeness, making it merciful, and loving, and ready to forgive, as he is.

2. This love disposes to prayer. To pray together, hearts must be consorted and turned together; otherwise, how can they sound the same suits harmoniously? How unpleasant, in the exquisite ear of God, who made the ear, are the jarring, disunited hearts that often seem to join in the same prayer, and yet are not set together in love! And when thou prayest alone, while thy heart is embittered and disaffected to thy brother, although upon an offence done to thee, it is as a mis-tuned instrument; the strings are not accorded, are not in tune amongst themselves, and so the sound is harsh and offensive. Try it well thyself, and thou wilt perceive it; how much more he to whom thou prayest! When thou art stirred and in passion against thy brother, or not, on the contrary, lovingly affected towards him, what broken, disordered, unfastened stuff are thy requests! Therefore the Lord will have this done first, the heart tuned: "Go thy way," says he, "leave thy gift, and be reconciled to thy brother: then come and offer thy gift," Matt. v. 23.

Why is this which is so much recommended by Christ, so little regarded by Christians? It is given by him as the characteristic and badge of his followers; yet, of those who pretend to be so, how few wear it! Oh! a little real Christianity were more worth than all that empty profession and discourse, that we think so much of. Hearts receiving the mould and stamp of this rule, these were living copies of the gospel. "Ye are our epistle," says the apostle, 2 Cor. iii. 2. We come together, and hear, and speak, sometimes of one grace, and sometimes of another, while yet the most never seek to

have their hearts enriched with the possession of any one of them. We search not to the bottom the perverseness of our nature, and the guiltiness that is upon us in these things; or we shift off the conviction, and find a way to forget it when the hour is done.

That accursed root, self-love, which makes man an enemy to God, and men enemies and devourers one of another, who sets to the discovery and the displanting of it? Who bends the force of holy endeavours and prayer, supplicating the hand of God for the plucking of it up? Some natures are quieter and make less noise, but till the heart be possessed with the love of God, it shall never truly love either men in the way due to all, or the children of God in their peculiar relation.

"Among yourselves," &c. That is here the point: the peculiar love of the saints as thy brethren, glorying and rejoicing in the same Father, the sons of God, "begotten again" to that "lively hope" of glory. Now these, as they owe a bountiful disposition to all, are mutually to love one another as brethren.

Thou that hatest and reproachest the godly, and the more they study to walk as the children of their holy Father, hatest them the more, and art glad to find a spot on them to point at, or wilt dash mire on them where thou findest none, know that thou art in this the enemy of God; know that the indignity done to them, Jesus Christ will take as done to himself. Truly, "we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren: he that loveth not his brother, abideth in death," 1 John iii. 14. So then, renounce this word, or else believe that thou art yet far from the life of Christ,

who so hatest it in others. Oh! but they are but a number of hypocrites, wilt thou say? If they be so, this declares so much the more thy extreme hatred of holiness, that thou canst not endure so much as the picture of it; canst not see any thing like it, but thou must let fly at it. And this argues thy deep hatred of God. Holiness in a Christian is the image of God, and the hypocrite, in the resemblance of it, is the image of a Christian; so that thou hatest the very image of the image of God. For, deceive not thyself, it is not the latent evil in hypocrisy, but the apparent good in it that thou hatest. The profane man thinks himself a great zealot against hypocrisy; he is still exclaiming against it; but it is only this he is angry at, that all should not be ungodly, the wicked enemies of religion, as he is, either dissolute, or merely decent. And the decent man is frequently the bitterest enemy of all strictness beyond his own size, as condemning him, and therefore he cries it down, as all of it false and counterfeit wares.

Let me entreat you, if you would not be found "fighters against God," let no revilings be heard amongst you against any who are, or seem to be, followers of holiness. If you will not reverence it yourselves, yet reverence it in others; at least, do not reproach it. It should be your ambition, else, why are you willing to be called Christians? But if you will not "pursue holiness," yet persecute it not. If you will not "have fervent love to the saints," yet burn not with infernal heat of fervent hatred against them; for truly, that is one of the most likely pledges of those flames, and of society with damned spirits, as love to the children of God is, of that inheritance and society with them in glory.

You that are brethren, and united by that purest

and strongest tie, as you are one in your Head, in your life derived from him, in your hopes of glory with him, seek to be more one in heart, in fervent love one to another in him. Consider the combinations and concurrences of the wicked against him and his "little flock," and let this provoke you to more united affection. Shall the scales of Leviathan, as one alludes, stick so close together, and shall not the members of Christ be more one and undivided? You that can feel it, stir up yourselves to bewail the present divisions, and the fears of more. Sue earnestly for that "one Spirit," to act and work more powerfully in the hearts of his people.

II. Consider the eminent degree of this love. 1. Its eminency amongst the graces, "Above all." 2. The high measure of it required, "Fervent love," [εκτενῆ,] a high bent or strain of it; that which acts strongly, and carries far.

1. It is eminent, that which indeed among Christians preserves all, and knits all together, and therefore called "the bond of perfection," Col. iii. 14; all is bound up by it. How can they pray together, how advance the name of their God, or keep in and stir up all grace in one another, unless they be united in love? How can they have access to God, or fellowship with him "who is love," as St. John speaks, if, instead of this sweet temper, there be rancour and bitterness among them? So then, uncharitableness and divisions amongst Christians do not only hinder their civil good, but their spiritual much more; and that not only *lucro cessante*, as they speak, interrupting the ways of mutual profiting, but *damno emergente*, it doth really damage them, and brings them to losses; preys upon their graces, as hot withering winds on herbs and plants.

Where the heart entertains either bitter malice, or but uncharitable prejudices, there will be a certain decay of spirituality in the whole soul.

2. Again, for the degree of this love required, it is not a cold indifference, a negative love, as I may call it, or a not willing of evil, nor is it a lukewarm wishing of good, but fervent and active love; for, if fervent, it will be active, a fire that will not be smothered, but will find a way to extend itself.

III. The fruits of this love follow. 1. Covering of evil, in this verse. 2. Doing of good, ver. 9, &c.

"Charity shall cover the multitude of sins." This expression is taken from Solomon, Prov. x. 12, and as covering sins is represented as a main act of love, so love is commended by it, this being a most useful and laudable act of it, that it "covers sins," and "a multitude of sins." Solomon saith, and the opposition clears the sense, "Hatred stirreth up strife," aggravates and makes the worst of all, "but love covereth all sins:" it delights not in the undue disclosing of brethren's failings, doth not eye them rigidly, nor expose them willingly to the eyes of others.

Now this recommends charity, in regard of its continual usefulness and necessity this way, considering human frailty, and that "in many things," as St. James speaks, "we all offend," James iii. 2, so that this is still needful on all hands. What do they think who are still picking at every appearing infirmity of their brethren? Know they not that the frailties which cleave to the saints of God while they are here, do stand in need of, and call for, this mutual office of love, to cover and pass them by? Who is there that stands not in need of this? If none, why are there any who deny it to others? There can be

no society nor entertaining of Christian converse without it, without giving, as we speak, allowance; reckoning to meet with defects and weaknesses on all hands, and covering the failings of one another, seeing it is mutually needful.

Again, as the necessity of this commends it and the love whence it flows, so there is that laudable ingenuousness in it, that should draw us to the liking of it. It is the bent of the basest and most worthless spirits, to be busy in the search and discovery of others' failings, passing by all that is commendable and imitable, as base flies readily sitting on any little sore they can find, rather than upon the sound parts. But the more excellent mind of a real Christian loves not unnecessarily to touch, no, nor to look upon them, but rather turns away. Such never uncover their brother's sores, but to cure them; and no more than is necessary for that end: they would willingly have them hid, that neither they nor others might see them.

This bars not the judicial trial of scandalous offences, nor the giving information of them, and bringing them under due censure. The forbearing of this is not charity, but both iniquity and cruelty; and this cleaves too much to many of us. They that cannot pass over the least touch of a wrong done to themselves, can digest twenty high injuries done to God by profane persons about them, and resent it not. Such may be assured, that they are as yet destitute of love to God, and of Christian love to their brethren, which springs from it.

The uncovering of sin, necessary to the curing of it, is not only no breach of charity, but is indeed a main point of it, and the neglect of it the highest kind of cruelty. But further than that goes, certainly,

this rule teaches the veiling of our brethren's infirmities from the eyes of others, and even from our own, that we look not on them with rigour; no, nor without compassion.

1. Love is skilful in finding out the fairest construction of things doubtful; and this is a great point. Take me the best action that can be named, pride and malice shall find a way to disgrace it, and put a hard visage upon it. Again, what is not undeniably evil, love will turn it in all the ways of viewing it, till it find the best and most favourable.

2. Where the thing is so plainly a sin, that this way of covering it can have no place, yet then will love consider what may lessen it most; whether a surprise, or strength of temptation, or ignorance, as our Saviour, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," or natural complexion, or, at least, will still take in human frailty, to turn all the bitterness of passion into sweet compassion.

3. All private reproofs, and, where conscience requires, public accusation and censure, even these will be sweetened in that compassion that flows from love. If it be such a sore as must not be let lie covered up, lest it prove deadly, so that it must be uncovered to be lanced and cut, that it may be cured, still this is to be done as loving the soul of the brother. Where the rule of conscience urges it not, then thou must bury it, and be so far from delighting to divulge such things, that, as far as without partaking in it thou mayest, thou must veil it from all eyes, and try the way of private admonition; and if the party appear to be humble and willing to be reclaimed, then forget it, cast it quite out of thy thoughts, that, as much as may be, thou mayest learn to forget it more. But this, I say, is to be done with the

tenderest bowels of pity, feeling the cuts thou art forced to give in that necessary incision, and using mildness and patience. Thus the apostle instructs his Timothy, "Reprove, rebuke, exhort," but do it with "long-suffering, with all long-suffering," 2 Tim. iv. 2. And even "them that oppose, instruct," says he, "with meekness, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth," 2 Tim. ii. 25.

4. If thou be interested in the offence, even by unfeigned free forgiveness, so far as thy concern goes, let it be as if it had not been. And though thou meet with many of these, charity will gain and grow by such occasions, and the more it hath covered, the more it can cover: "cover a multitude," says our apostle; "covers all sins," says Solomon. Yea, though thou be often put to it by the same party, what made thee forgive once, well improved, will stretch our Saviour's rule to "seventy times seven times in one day," Matt. xviii. 21, 22.

And truly, in this men mistake grossly, who think it is greatness of spirit to resent wrongs, and baseness to forgive them: on the contrary, it is the only excellent spirit scarcely to feel a wrong, or, feeling, straightly to forgive it. It is the greatest and best of spirits that enables to this, the Spirit of God, that dove-like spirit which rested on our Lord Jesus, and which from him is derived to all that are in him. I pray you, think, is it not a token of a tender sickly body, to be altered with every touch from every blast it meets with? And thus is it a sign of a poor, weak, sickly spirit, to endure nothing, to be distempered at the least air of an injury, yea, with the very fancy of it, where there is really none.

Inference 1. Learn then to beware of those evils

that are contrary to this charity. Do not dispute with yourselves in rigid remarks and censures, when the matter will bear any better sense.

2. Do not delight in tearing a wound wider, and stretching a real failing to the utmost.

3. In handling of it, study gentleness, pity, and meekness. These will advance the cure, whereas thy flying out into passion against thy fallen brother, will prove nothing but as the putting of thy nail into the sore, that will readily rankle it, and make it worse. Even sin may be sinfully reproved; and how thinkest thou that sin shall redress sin, and restore the sinner?

There is a great deal of spiritual art and skill in dealing with another's sin: it requires much spirituality of mind, and much prudence, and much love, a mind clear from passion; for that blinds the eye, and makes the hand rough, so that a man neither rightly sees, nor rightly handles the sore he goes about to cure; and many are lost through the ignorance and neglect of that due temper which is to be brought to this work. Men think otherwise, that their rigours are much spirituality; but they mistake it. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted," Gal. vi. 1.

4. For thyself, as an offence touches thee, learn to delight as much in that Divine way of forgiveness, as carnal minds do in that base, inhuman way of revenge. It is not, as they judge, a glory to bluster and swagger for every thing, but the "glory of a man to pass by a transgression," Prov. xix. 11. This makes him God-like. And consider thou often that love which covers all thine, that blood which

was shed to wash off thy guilt. Needs any more be said to gain all in this that can be required of thee?

Now, the other fruit of love, "doing good," is first expressed in one particular, ver. 9, and then dilated to a general rule, at ver. 10.

Ver. 9. Use hospitality one to another without grudging.

Hospitality, or kindness to strangers, is mentioned here as an important fruit of love, it being, in those times and places, in much use in travel, and particularly needful often among Christians one to another then, by reason of hot and general persecutions. But under this name, I conceive all other supply of the wants of our brethren in outward things to be here comprehended.

Now, for this, the way and measure, indeed, must receive its proportion from the estate and ability of persons. But certainly, the great straitening of hands in these things, is more from the straitness of hearts than of means. A large heart, with a little estate, will do much with cheerfulness and little noise, while hearts glued to the poor riches they possess, or rather are possessed by, can scarcely part with any thing, till they be pulled from all.

Now, for the supplying of our brethren's necessities, one good help is, the retrenching of our own superfluities. Turn the stream into that channel where it will refresh thy brethren and enrich thyself, and let it not run into the dead sea. Thy vain excessive entertainments, thy gaudy variety of dresses—these thou dost not challenge, thinking it is of thine own; but know, as it follows, ver. 10, thou art but "steward" of it, and this is not faithfully laying

out; thou canst not answer for it. Yea, it is robbery; thou robbest thy poor brethren who want necessaries, whilst thou lavishest thus on unnecessaries. Such a feast, such a suit of apparel, is direct robbery in the Lord's eye; and the poor may cry, That is mine that you cast away so vainly, by which both I and you might be profited. "Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it," Prov. iii. 27, 28.

"Without grudging." Some look to the actions, but few to the intention and posture of mind in them; and yet that is the main: it is all indeed, even with men, so far as they can perceive it, much more with thy Lord, who always perceives it to the full. He delights in the good he does his creatures, and would have them be so affected to one another; especially he would have his children bear this trait of his likeness. See then, when thou givest alms, or entertainest a stranger, that there be nothing either of under-grumbling, or crooked self-seeking in it. Let the "left hand" have no hand in it, nor so much as "know" of it, as our Saviour directs, Matt. vi. 3. Let it not be to please men, or to please thyself, or simply out of a natural pity, or from the consideration of thy own possible incidency into the like case, which many think very well, if they be so moved; but here is a higher principle moving thee, love to God, and to thy brother in and for him. This will make it cheerful and pleasant to thyself, and well pleasing to him for whom thou dost it. We lose much in actions, in themselves good, both of piety and charity, through disregard of our hearts in them; and nothing will prevail with us, to be more intent this way, to look more on our hearts, but this, to look more on him who looks

on them, and judges, and accepts all according to them.

Though all the sins of former ages gather and fall into the latter times, this is pointed out as the grand evil—uncharitableness. The apostle St. Paul tells us, that "in the last days, men shall be covetous, slanderers, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God," 2 Tim. iii. 2: but how? From whence all this confluence of evils? The spring of all is put first, and that is the direct opposite of Christian love: men shall be [φιλαυτοι] "lovers of themselves." This is what kills the love of God and the love of our brethren, and kindles that infernal fire of love to please themselves: riches make men voluptuous and covetous, &c. Truly, whatsoever becomes of men's curious computations of times, this wretched selfishness and decay of love may save us the labour of much *chronological* debate in this, and lead us, from this certain character of them, to conclude these to be the "latter times," in a very strict sense. All other sins are come down along, and run combined now with this; but truly, uncharitableness is the main one. As old age is a rendezvous or meeting-place of maladies, but is especially subject to cold diseases, thus is it in the old age of the world: many sins abound, but especially coldness of love, as our Saviour foretells it, that in "the last days the love of many shall wax cold," Matt. xxiv. 12. As the disease of the youth of the world was, the "abounding of lust," Gen. vi., so that of its age is, "decay of love." And as that heat called for a total deluge of waters, so this coldness calls for fire, the kindling of an universal fire, that shall make an end of it and the world together. *Aqua propter ardorem libidinis, ignis propter teporem charitatis:*

"Water because of the heat of lust, fire because of the coldness of charity."

But they alone are the happy men, and have the advantage of all the world, in whom the world is burnt up beforehand, by another fire, that Divine fire of the love of God, kindled in their hearts, by which they ascend up to him, and are reflected from him upon their brethren, with a benign heat and influence for their good. Oh! be unsatisfied with yourselves, and restless, still you find it thus, till you find your hearts possessed of this excellent grace of love, that you may have it, and use it, and it may grow by using and acting. I could, methinks, heartily study on this, and weary you with the reiterated pressing of this one thing, if there were hopes, in so wearying you, to weary you out of those evils that are contrary to it, and in pressing this grace, to make any real impression of it upon your hearts. Besides all the further good that follows it, there is in this love itself so much peace and sweetness, as abundantly pays itself, and all the labour of it; whereas pride and malice do fill the heart with continual vexations and disquiet, and eat out the very bowels wherein they breed. Aspire to this, to be wholly bent, not only to procure or desire hurt to none, but to wish and seek the good of all: and as for those that are in Christ, surely, that will unite thy heart to them, and stir thee up, according to thy opportunities and power, to do them good, as parts of Christ, and of the same body with thyself.

Ver. 10. As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

This is the rule concerning the gifts and graces

bestowed on men. And we have here, 1. Their difference in their kind and measure. 2. Their concordance in their source and use.

1. Their difference in their kind and measure, is expressed in the first clause, "As every one hath received;" then, again, in the last clause, [ποικίλη χάρις,] "various or manifold grace;" where χάρις, grace, is all one with the former, χάρισμα, gift, and is taken at large for all kind of endowments and furniture by which men are enabled for mutual good. One man hath riches; another, authority and command; another, wit or eloquence, or learning; and some, though eminent in some one, yet have a fuller conjuncture of divers of these. We find not more difference in visages and statures of body, than in qualifications and abilities of mind, which are the visage and stature of it; yea, the odds is far greater betwixt man and man in this, than it can be in the other.

2. Now, this difference accords well with the accordance here expressed in their common spring and common use. For the variety of these many gifts suits well with the singular riches and wisdom of their one Giver, and with the common advantage and benefit of the many receivers. And in the usefulness of that variety to the receivers shine forth the bounty and wisdom of the Giver, in so ordering all that diversity to one excellent end. So this ποικίλη χάρις, "manifold grace" here, commends that πολυποίκιλος σοφία, "manifold wisdom," that the apostle speaks of, Eph. iii. 10.

There is such an admirable beauty in this variety, such a symmetry and contemperature of different, yea, of contrary qualities, as speaks his riches, that so divers gifts are from the same Spirit; a kind of

"embroidering,"* of many colours happily mixed, as the word ποικιλλειν signifies: as it is in the frame of the natural body of man, that lesser world, and in the composition of the greater world, thus it is in the church of God, the mystical body of Jesus Christ, exceeding both in excellency and beauty.

And as there is such art in this contrivance, and such comeliness in the resulting frame, so it is no less useful. And this chiefly commends the thing itself, and the supreme wisdom ordering it, that, as in the body, each part hath not only its place for proportion and order, but its several use; and as in the world, each part is beneficial to another; so here, every man's gift relates and is fitted to some use for the good of others.

Inference 1. The first thing which meets us here, it is very useful to know, that all is "received," and received of "gift," of most "free gift:" so the words do carry. Now this should most reasonably check all murmuring in those who receive least, and all insulting in those that receive most. Whatever it is, do not repine; but praise, how little soever it is, for it is a free gift. Again, how much soever it is, "be not high-minded, but fear;" boast not thyself, but humbly bless thy Lord. "For if thou didst receive it, why dost thou boast, as if thou hadst not received it?" 1 Cor. iv. 7.

Inference 2. Every man hath received some gift, no man all gifts; and this, rightly considered, would keep all in a more even temper. As, in nature, nothing is altogether useless, so nothing is self-sufficient. This should keep the meanest from repining and discontent: He that hath the lowest rank in most respects, yet something he hath received, that

* The psalmist's word applied to the body, Psa. cxxxix. 15.

is not only a good to himself, but, rightly improved, may be so to others likewise. And this will curb the loftiness of the most highly privileged, and teach them, not only to see some deficiencies in themselves, and some gifts in far meaner persons, which they want, but, besides the simple discovery of this, it will put them upon the use of what is in lower persons; not only to stoop to the acknowledgment, but even, withal, to the participation and benefit of it; not to trample upon all that is below them, but to take up and use things useful, though lying at their feet. Some flowers and herbs, that grow very low, are of a very fragrant smell and healthful use.

Thou that carriest it so high, losest much by it. Many poor Christians whom thou despisest to make use of, may have that in them which might be very useful for thee; but thou overlookest it, and treadest on it. St. Paul acknowledgeth he was "comforted by the coming of Titus," though far inferior to him. Sometimes, a very mean, unlettered Christian may speak more profitably and comfortably, even to a knowing, learned man, than multitudes of his own best thoughts can do, especially in a time of weakness and darkness.

Inference 3. As all is received and with that difference, so the third thing is, that all is received "to minister to each other," and mutual benefit is the true use of all, suiting the mind of him who dispenses all, and the way of his dispensation. Thou art not proprietary lord of any thing thou hast, but *οἰκόνομος*, "a steward;" and therefore oughtest gladly to be a good steward, that is, both faithful and prudent in thy intrusted gifts, using all thou hast to the good of the household, and so to the advantage of thy

Lord and Master. Hast thou abilities of estate, or body, or mind? Let all be thus employed. Thinkest thou that thy wealth, or power, or wit is thine, to do with as thou wilt, to engross to thyself, either to retain useless, or to use; to hoard and wrap up, or to lavish out, according as thy humour leads thee? No, all is given as to a steward, wisely and faithfully to lay up, and lay out. Not only thy outward and common gifts of mind, but even saving grace, which seems most intrusted and appropriated for thy private good, yet is not wholly for that; even thy graces are for the good of thy brethren.

Oh, that we would consider this in all, and look back and mourn on the fruitlessness of all that hath been in our hand all our life hitherto! If it has not been wholly fruitless, yet how far short of that fruit we might have brought forth! Any little thing done by us looks big in our eye; we view it through a magnifying glass; but who may not complain that their means, and health, and opportunities of several kinds, of doing for God, and for our brethren, have lain dead upon their hands, in a great part? As Christians are defective in other duties of love, so most in that most important duty, of advancing the spiritual good of each other. Even they who have grace, do not duly use it to mutual edification. I desire none to leap over the bounds of their calling, or the rules of Christian prudence in their converse; yea, this were much to be blamed; but I fear lest unwary hands, throwing on water to quench that evil, have let some of it fall aside upon those sparks that should rather have been stirred and blown up.

Neither should the disproportion of gifts and graces hinder Christians to "minister one to

another:" it should neither move the weaker to envy the stronger, nor the stronger to despise the weaker; but each, in his place, is to be serviceable to the others, as the apostle excellently presses, by that most fit resemblance of the parts of the body. As the foot says not, Why am I not the eye or the head, the head cannot say of the foot, I have no need of thee, 1 Cor. xii. 15, 21. There is no envy, no despising in the natural body. Oh the pity there should be so much in the mystical! Were we more spiritual, less of this would be found. In the mean time, oh that we were more agreeable to that happy estate we look for, in our present aspect and carriage one towards another! Though all the graces of the Spirit exist, in some measure, where there is one, yet not all in a like measure. One Christian is more eminent in meekness, another in humility, a third in zeal, &c. Now, by their spiritual converse one with another, each may be a gainer; and in many ways may a private Christian promote the good of others with whom he lives, by seasonable admonitions, and advice, and reproof, sweetened with meekness, but most by holy example, which is the most lively and most effectual speech.

Thou that hast greater gifts hast more intrusted in thy hand, and therefore the greater thy obligation to fidelity and diligence. Men in great place and public services ought to stir themselves up by this thought, to singular watchfulness and zeal. And in private converse one with another, we ought to be doing and receiving spiritual good. Are we not strangers here? Is it not strange that we so often meet and part, without a word of our home, or the way to it, or our advance towards it? Christians

should be trading one with another in spiritual things; and he, surely, who faithfully uses most, receives most. This is comprehended under that word: "To him that hath," that is, possesses actively and usefully, "shall be given: and from him that hath not," that is, uses not, "shall be taken away even that which he hath," Matt. xxv. 29. Merchants can feel in their trading a dead time, and complain seriously of it; but Christians, in theirs, either can suffer it and not see it, or see it and not complain, or, possibly, complain, and yet not be deeply sensible of it.

Certainly, it cannot be sufficiently regretted, that we are so fruitless in the Lord's work in this kind, that when we are alone we study it not more, nor seek it more by prayer, to know the true use of all we receive, and that we do not in society endeavour it accordingly; but we trifle out our time, and instead of the commerce of grace to our mutual enriching, we trade in vanity, and are, as it were, children exchanging shells and toys together.

This surely will lie heavy upon the conscience when we reflect on it, and shall come near the utter brink of time, looking forwards on eternity, and then looking back to our days, so vainly wasted, and worn out to so little purpose. Oh! let us awake, awake ourselves and one another, to more fruitfulness and faithfulness, whatsoever be our received measure, less or more.

Be not discouraged: to have little in the account shall be no prejudice. The approbation runs not, "Thou hast much," but, on the contrary, "Thou hast been faithful in little." Great faithfulness in the use of small gifts hath great acceptance, and a great and sure reward. Great receipts engage to

greater returns, and therefore require the greater diligence; and that not only for the increase of grace within, but for the assistance of it in others. Retired contemplation may be more pleasing, but due activity for God and his church is more profitable. Rachel was fair, but she was barren; Leah blear-eyed, but fruitful.

Ver. 11. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Every part of the body of Christ, as it partakes of life with the rest, so it imparts service to the rest. But there be some more eminent, and, as I may say, organic parts of this body, and these are more eminently useful to the whole. Therefore the apostle, having enlarged into a general precept, adds a word in special preference to these special parts, the preachers of the word, and (which here I conceive is meant by deacons or ministers) the other assistant officers of the church of God.

These are co-ordained by Jesus Christ, as Lord of his own house, to be serviceable to him in it. He fits and sanctifies for this great work, all who are called unto it by himself. And they are directed for the acquitting of their great work, I. By a clear rule of the due manner. II. By the main end of its appointment.

I. Particular rules for the preaching of the word may be many, but this is the most comprehensive one which the apostle gives: "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." It is clear from the rule, what speaking is regulated, and for

brevity it is once expressed. If any man speak the oracles of God, let him speak them like themselves, "as the oracles of God."

It is a chief thing in all serious actions, to take the nature of them aright: for this mainly regulates them, and directs in their performance. And this especially should be regarded in those things that are of highest worth and greatest weight, in spiritual employments, wherein it is most dangerous, and yet with us most ordinary, to mistake and miscarry. Were prayer considered as presence and speech with the great God, the King of glory, oh, how would this mould the mind! What a watchful, holy, and humble deportment would it teach! So that truly, all directions for prayer might be summed up, after this same model, in this one, If any man pray, let him speak "as speaking with God;" just as here for preaching—If any man speak in that way, let him do it as "speaking from God," that is, "as the oracles of God." Under this, all the due qualifications of this holy work are comprised. I shall name but these three, which are primary, and others may be easily reduced to these: 1. Faithfully. 2. Holily. 3. Wisely.

1. In the first, fidelity, it is supposed that a man should have a competent insight and knowledge in these Divine oracles, that first he learn before he teach; which many of us do not, though we pass through the schools and classes, and through the books too, wherein these things are taught, and bring with us some provision, such as may be had there. He that would faithfully teach of God, must be "taught of God," be θεοδιδακτὸς, "God-learned;" and this will help to all the rest; will help him to be faithful in delivering the message as he receives

it, not detracting, or adding, or altering; and as in setting forth that in general truths, so in the particular setting them home, declaring to his people their sins, and God's judgments following sin, especially in his own people.

2. A minister must speak holily, with that high esteem and reverence of the Great Majesty whose message he carries, that becomes the divinity of the message itself, those deep mysteries that no created spirits are able to fathom. Oh! this would make us tremble in the dispensing of these oracles, considering our impurities, and weaknesses, and unspeakable disproportion to so high a task. He had reason who said, "I am seized with amazement and horror as often as I begin to speak of God." And with this humble reverence is to be joined, ardent love to our Lord, to his truth, to his glory, and his people's souls. These holy affections stand opposite to our blind boldness in rushing on this sublime exercise as a common work, and our dead coldness in speaking of things which our hearts are not warmed with; and so no wonder that what we say seldom reaches further than the ear, or, at furthest, than the understanding and memory of our hearers. There is a correspondence; it is the heart speaks to the heart, and the understanding and memory the same, and the tongue speaks but to the ear. Further, this holy temper shuts out all private passion in delivering Divine truths. It is a high profaning of his name and holy things, to make them speak our private pleas and quarrels; yea, to reprove sin after this manner is a heinous sin. To fly out into invectives, which, though not expressed so, yet are aimed as blows of self-revenge for injuries done to us, or fancied by us, this is to wind

and draw the holy word of God to serve our unholy distempers, and to make it speak, not his meaning, but our own. Surely, this is not to speak "as the oracles of God," but basely to abuse the word, as impostors in religion of old did their images, speaking behind them, and through them, what might make for their advantage. It is true that the word is to be particularly applied to reprove most the particular sins which most abound amongst a people; but this is to be done, not in anger, but in love.

3. The word is to be spoken wisely. By this I mean, in the way of delivering it, that it be done gravely and decently; that light expressions, and affected flourishes, and unseemly gestures, be avoided; and that there be a sweet contemperature of authority and mildness. But "who is sufficient for these things?"

Now, you that hear shoul certainly meet and agree in this too. If any hear, let him hear "as the oracles of God;" not as a well-tuned sound, to help you to sleep an hour; not as a human speech or oration, to displease or please you for an hour, according to the suiting of its strain and your palate; not as a school lesson, to add somewhat to your stock of knowledge, to tell you somewhat you knew not before, or as a feast of new notions. Thus the most relish a preacher, while they try his gift, and it is new with them, but a little time disgusts them. But hear as the oracles of God. The discovery of sin and death lying on us, and the discovery of a Saviour, that takes these off; the sweet word of reconciliation, God wooing man; the Great King entreating for peace with a company of rebels,—not that they are too strong for him—oh! no; but, on the contrary, he could utterly destroy them in one

moment: these are the things brought you in this word. Therefore come to it with suitable reverence, with ardent desires, and hearts open to receive it "with meekness, as the ingrafted word that is able to save your souls," James i. 21. It were well worth one day's pains of speaking and hearing, that we could learn somewhat, at least, how to speak and hear henceforward; to speak, and to hear, as the oracles of God.

In the other rule, of "ministering as of the ability that God giveth," we may observe: 1. Ability, and that received from God; for other ability, there is none for any good work, and least of all for the peculiar ministration of his spiritual affairs in his house. 2. The using of this ability received from him for them.

And this, truly, is a chief thing for ministers, and for individual Christians, still to depend on the influence and strength of God; to do all his works in that strength. The humblest Christian, how weak soever, is the strongest. There is a natural wretched independency in us, that we would be the authors of our own works, and do all without him, without whom indeed we can do nothing. Let us learn to go more out of ourselves, and we shall find more strength for our duties, and against our temptations. Faith's great work is, to renounce self-power, and to bring in the power of God to be ours. Happy they that are weakest in themselves, sensibly so. That saying of the apostle is theirs; they know what it means, though a riddle to the world: "When I am weak, then am I strong," 2 Cor. xii. 10. Now,

II. The end of all this appointment is, "that in all God may be glorified through Jesus Christ." All meet in this, if they move in their straight line:

here concentre, not only these two sorts specified in this verse, but all sorts of persons that use aright any gift of God, as they are generally comprehended in the former verse. For this end relates to all, as it is expressed universally, "That in all," in all persons and all things; the word bears both, and the thing itself extends to both.

Here we have, like that of the heavens, a circular motion of all sanctified good: it comes forth from God, through Christ, unto Christians, and moving in them to the mutual good of each other, returns through Christ unto God again, and takes them along with it, in whom it was, and had its motion.

All persons and all things shall pay this tribute, even they that most wickedly seek to withhold it; but this is the happiness of the saints, that they move willingly thus, are sweetly drawn, not forced or driven. They are gained to seek and desire this, to set in with God in the intention of the same end; to have the same purpose with him, his glory in all, and to prosecute his end by his direction, by the means and ways he appoints them.

This is his due, as God; and the declining from this, the squinting from this view to self-ends, especially in God's own peculiar work, is high treason. Yet, the base heart of man leads naturally this way, to intend himself in all, to raise his own esteem or advantage in some way. And in this the heart is so subtle, that it will deceive the most discerning, if they be not constant in suspecting and watching it. This is the great task—to overcome in this point; to have self under our feet, and God only in our eye and purpose in all.

It is most reasonable, his due as God the Author of all, not only of all supervenient good, but even

of being itself, seeing all is from him, that all be for him: "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen." Rom. xi. 36.

As it is most just, so it is also most sweet to aim in all at this, "that God be glorified:" it is the alone worthy and happy design, which fills the heart with heavenliness, and with a heavenly calmness; sets it above the clouds and storms of those passions which disquiet low, self-seeking minds. He is a miserable, unsettled wretch, who cleaves to himself and forgets God; is perplexed about his credit, and gain, and base ends, which are often broken, and which, when he attains, yet they and he must shortly perish together. When his estate, or designs, or any comforts fail, how can he look to him at whom he looked so little before? May not the Lord say, "Go to the gods whom thou hast served, and let them deliver and comfort thee;" seek comfort from thyself, as thou didst all for thyself? What an appalment will this be! But he that hath resigned himself and his all for God, may say confidently, "The Lord is my portion." This is the Christian's aim, to have nothing in himself, nor in any thing, but on this tenure: all for the glory of my God,—my estate, family, abilities, my whole self, all I have and am. And as the love of God grows in the heart, this purpose grows: the higher the flame rises, the purer it is. The eye is daily more upon it; it is oftener in the mind in all actions than before. In common things, the very works of our callings, our very refreshments, to eat, and drink, and sleep, are all for this end, and with a particular aim at it as much as may be; even the thought of it often renewed throughout the day, and at times, generally

applied to all our ways and employments. It is this elixir that turns thy ordinary works into gold, into sacrifices, by the touch of it.

"Through Jesus Christ." The Christian in covenant with God, receives all this way, and returns all this way. And Christ possesses, and hath equal right with the Father to this glory, as he is equally the spring of it with him, as God. But it is conveyed through him as Mediator, who obtains all the grace we receive; and all the glory we return, and all our praise, as our spiritual sacrifice, is put into his hand as our High Priest, to offer up for us, that they may be accepted.

Now the holy ardour of the apostle's affections, taken with the mention of this glory of God, carries him to a doxology, as we term it, a rendering of glory, in the middle of his discourse. Thus often we find in St. Paul likewise. Poor and short-lived is the glory and grandeur of men; like themselves, it is a shadow, and nothing; but this is solid and lasting, it is supreme, and abideth "for ever." And the apostles, full of Divine affections, and admiring nothing but God, do delight in this, and cannot refrain from this at any time in their discourse: it is always sweet and seasonable, and they find it so. And thus are spiritual minds: a word of this nature falls on them as a spark on some matter that readily takes fire; they are straight inflamed with it. But alas! to us how much is it otherwise! The mention of the praises and glory of our God, is, to our hearts, as a spark falling either into a puddle of water, and foul water too, or at least as upon green timber, that much fire will not kindle; there is so much moisture of our humours and corruptions, that all dies out with us, and we remain cold and dead.

But were not this a high and blessed condition, to be in all estates in some willing readiness to bear a part in this song, to acknowledge the greatness and goodness of our God, and to wish him glory in all? What are the angels doing? This is their business, and that without end. And seeing we hope to partake with them, we should even here, though in a lower key, and not so tunably neither, yet, as we may, begin it; and upon all occasions, our hearts should be often following in this sweet note, or offering at it, "To him be glory and dominion for ever."

Ver. 12. Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:
13. But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

This fighting life, surely, when we consider it aright, we need not be dissuaded from loving it, but have rather need to be strengthened with patience to go through, and to fight on with courage and assurance of victory; still combating in a higher strength than our own, against sin within and troubles without. This is the great scope of this Epistle, and the apostle often interchanges his advices and comforts in reference to these two. "Against sin" he instructs us in the beginning of this chapter, urging us to be armed, "armed with the same mind" that was in Christ, and here again, "against suffering," and both in a like way. In the mortifying of sin, we suffer with him, as there he teaches, verse 1 of this chapter: and in the encountering of affliction, we suffer with him, as here we have it: and so, the

same mind in the same sufferings will bring us to the same issue. "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, &c. But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye likewise may be glad with exceeding joy."

The words, to the end of the chapter, contain grounds of encouragement and consolation for the children of God in sufferings, especially in suffering for God.

These two verses have these two things: I. The close conjunction of sufferings with the estate of a Christian. II. The due composure of a Christian towards suffering.

I. It is no new, and therefore no strange thing, that sufferings, hot sufferings, fiery ones, be the companions of religion. Besides the common miseries of human life, there is an accession of troubles and hatreds for that holiness of life to which the children of God are called.

It was the lot of the church from her wicked neighbours, and in the church, the lot of the most holy and peculiar servants of God, from the profane multitude. "Woe is me, my mother," says Jeremiah, "that thou hast borne me a man of strife, and a man of contention to the whole earth," Jer. xv. 10. And of all the prophets, says not our Saviour, handling this same argument in his sermon, "So persecuted they the prophets that were before you?" Matt. v. 12. And afterwards, he tells them what they might look for: "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves," Matt. x. 16. And, in general, there is no following of Christ, but with his badge and burden. Something is to be left, we ourselves are to be left—"Whosoever will be my

disciple, let him deny himself;" and somewhat to take—"Take up his cross and follow me," Matt. xvi. 24. And doth not the apostle give his scholars this universal lesson, as an infallible truth, "All that will live godly in Jesus Christ, shall suffer persecution?" Look in the close of that roll of believers conquering in suffering, what a cluster of sufferings and torture you have, Heb. xi. 36, &c. Thus in the primitive times, the trial, and fiery trial, even literally so, continued long. Those wicked emperors hated the very innocence of Christians; and the people, though they knew their blameless carriage, yet, when any evil came, would pick this quarrel, and still cry, *Christianos ad leones.*

Now this, if we look to inferior causes, is "not strange;" the malignant, ungodly world hating holiness, "hating the light," yea, the very shadow of it. And the more the children of God walk like their Father and their home, the more unlike must they, of necessity, become to the world about them, and therefore become the very mark of all their enmities and malice.

And thus, indeed, the godly, though the "sons of peace," are the improper causes, the occasion of much noise and disturbance in the world; as their Lord, the Prince of Peace, avows it openly of himself in that sense, "I came not to send peace, but a sword, to set a man at variance with his father, and the daughter against the mother," &c., Matt. x. 34, 35. If a son in a family begin to inquire after God, and withdraw from their profane or dead way, oh, what a clamour rises presently! "Oh, my son, or daughter, or wife, is become a plain fool," &c. And then is all done that may be, to quell and vex them, and make their life grievous to them.

The exact holy walking of a Christian really condemns the world about him: shows the disorder and foulness of their profane ways. The life of religion, set by the side of dead formality, discovers it to be a carcass, a lifeless appearance; and, for this, neither grossly wicked, nor decent, formal persons, can well digest it. There is in the life of a Christian a convincing light, that shows the deformity of the works of darkness; and a piercing heat, that scorches the ungodly, and stirs and troubles their consciences. This they cannot endure, and hence rises in them a contrary fire of wicked hatred, and hence the trials, the fiery trials of the godly. If they could get those precise persons removed out of their way, they think they might then have more room, and live at more liberty: as it is, Rev. xi. 10, a "carousing" [χαροῦσιν]. What a dance there was about the two dead bodies of the two witnesses! "The people and nations rejoiced, and made merry, and sent gifts one to another, because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth." And from the same hearth, I mean the same wickedness of heart in the world, are the fires of persecution kindled against the saints in the world, and the bonfires of joy when they are rid of them.

And as this is an infernal fire of enmity against God, so it is blown by that spirit whose element it is. Satan stirs up and blows the coal, and raises the hatred of the ungodly against Christians.

But while he, and they in whom he powerfully works, are thus working for their vile ends in the persecutions of the saints, HE who sovereignly orders all, is working in the same his wise and gracious ends, and attains them, and makes the malice of his enemies serve his ends and undo their own. It is

true, that by the heat of persecution many are scared from embracing religion: such as love themselves and their present ease, and others that seemed to have embraced it, are driven to let it go and fall from it; but yet, when all is well computed, religion is still upon the gaining hand. Those who reject it, or revolt from it, are such as have no true knowledge of it, or share in it, nor in that happiness in which it ends. But they that are indeed united to Jesus Christ, do cleave the closer to him, and seek to have their hearts more fastened to him, because of the trials that they are, or may probably be put to. And in their victorious patience appears the invincible power of religion where it hath once gained the heart, that it cannot be beaten or burnt out: itself is a fire more mighty than all the fires kindled against it. The love of Christ conquers and triumphs in the hardest sufferings of life, and in death itself.

And this hath been the means of kindling it in other hearts which were strangers to it, when they beheld the victorious patience of the saints, who conquered dying, as their Head did; who wearied their tormentors, and triumphed over their cruelty by a constancy far above it.

Thus, these fiery trials make the lustre of faith most appear, as gold shines brightest in the furnace; and if any dross be mixed with it, it is refined and purified from it by these trials, and so it remains, by means of the fire, purer than before. And both these are in the resemblance here intended; that the fire of sufferings is for the advantage of believers, both as trying the excellency of faith, giving evidence of it what it is, and also purifying it from earth and drossy mixtures, and making it more excellently what it is, raising it to a higher pitch of

refinedness and worth. In these fires, as faith is tried, so the word on which faith relies is tried, and is found *all gold*, most precious, no refuse in it. The truth and sweetness of the promises are much confirmed in the Christian's heart, upon his experiment of them in his sufferings. His God is found to be as good as his word, being with him when he goes through the fire, Isa. xliii. 2, preserving him, so that he loses nothing except dross, which is a gainful loss, leaves only of his corruption behind him.

Oh! how much worth is it, and how doth it endear the heart to God, to have found him sensibly present in the times of trouble, refreshing the soul with dews of spiritual comfort, in the midst of the flames of fiery trial!

One special advantage of these fires is, the purifying of a Christian's heart from the love of the world, and of present things. It is true, the world at best is base and despicable, in respect of the high estate and hopes of a believer; yet still there is somewhat within him, that would bend him downwards, and draw him to too much complacency in outward things, if they were much to his mind. Too kind usage might sometimes make him forget himself, and think himself at home, at least so much as not to entertain those longings after home, and that ardent progress homewards, that become him. It is good for us, certainly, to find hardship, and enmities, and contempts here, and to find them frequent, that we may not think them "strange," but ourselves "strangers," and may think it were strange for us to be otherwise entertained. This keeps the affections more clear and disengaged, sets them upward. Thus the Lord makes the world displeasing to his

own, that they may turn in to him, and seek all their consolations in himself. Oh, unspeakable advantage!

II. The composure of a Christian in reference to sufferings, is prescribed in these two following, resolving and rejoicing: 1. Resolving to endure them, reckoning upon them, "Think it not strange," μὴ ξενιζεσθε; 2. Rejoicing in them, χαίρετε, "Be glad, inasmuch," &c.

Be not strangers in it:—which yet naturally we would be. We are willing to hear of peace and ease, and would gladly believe what we extremely desire. It is a thing of prime concern, to take at first a right notion of Christianity. This many do not, and so either fall off quickly, or walk on slowly and heavily; they do not reckon right the charges, take not into the account the duties of doing and suffering, but think to perform some duties, if they may with ease, and have no other foresight; they do not consider that self-denial, that fighting against a man's self, and fighting vehemently with the world, those trials, fiery trials, which a Christian must encounter with. As they observe of other points, so Popery is in this very compliant with nature, which is a very bad sign in religion. We would be content, it were true, that the true church of Christ had rather prosperity and pomp for her badge than the cross; much ease and riches, and few or no crosses, except they were painted and gilded crosses, such as that church hath chosen, instead of real ones.

Most men would give religion a fair countenance, if it gave them fair weather; and they that do indeed acknowledge Christ to be the Son of God, as St. Peter did, yet are naturally as unwilling as he was, to hear the hard news of suffering; and if their

advice might have place, would readily be of his mind, "Be it far from thee, Lord," Matt. xvi. 22, 23. His good confession was not, but this kind advice was "from flesh and blood," and from an evil spirit, as the sharp answer tells; "Get thee behind me, Satan, thou art an offence unto me."

You know what kind of Messiah the Jews generally dreamed of, and therefore took offence at the meanness and sufferings of Christ, expecting an earthly king, and an outwardly flourishing state. And the disciples themselves, after they had been long with him, were still in that same dream, when they were contesting about imaginary places. Yea, they were scarcely well out of it, even after his suffering and death: all the noise and trouble of that had not well awaked them. "We trusted it had been he which should have restored Israel," Luke xxiv. 21.

And, after all that we have read and heard of ancient times, and of Jesus Christ himself, his sufferings in the flesh, and of his apostles and his saints, from one age to another, yet still we have our inclinations to this practice of driving troubles far off from our thoughts, till they come upon our backs, fancying nothing but rest and ease, till we be shaken rudely out of it.

How have we of late flattered ourselves, many of us one year after another, upon slight appearances, Oh, now it will be peace! And, behold, still trouble hath increased, and these thoughts have proved the lying visions of our own hearts, while "the Lord hath not spoken of it," Ezek. xiii. 7. And thus, of late, have we thought it at hand, and taken ways of our own to hasten it, which, I fear, will prove fool's haste, as you say.

You that know the Lord, seek him earnestly for the averting of further troubles and combustions, which, if you look aright, you will find threatening us as much as ever. And withal, seek hearts prepared and fixed for days of trial, "fiery trial." Yea, though we did obtain some breathing of our outward peace, yet shall not the followers of Christ want their trials from the hatred of the ungodly world. "If it persecuted me," says he, "it will also persecute you," John xv. 20.

Acquaint, therefore, your thoughts and hearts with sufferings, that when they come, thou and they, not being strangers, may agree and comply the better. Do not afflict yourselves with vain fears beforehand of troubles to come, and so make uncertain evils a certain vexation by advance; but thus forethink the hardest trial you are likely to be put to for the name and cause of Christ, and labour for a holy stability of mind, for encountering it if it should come upon you. Things certainly fall the lighter on us, when they fall first upon our thoughts. In this way, indeed, of an imagined suffering, the conquest beforehand may be but imaginary, and thou mayest fail in the trial. Therefore, be still humble and dependent on the strength of Christ, and seek to be previously furnished with much distrust of thyself, and much trust in him, with much denial of thyself, and much love to him; and this preparing and training of the heart may prove useful, and make it more dexterous, when brought to a real conflict. In all, both beforehand and in the time of the trial, make thy Lord Jesus all thy strength. That is our only way—in all to be conquerors, "to be more than conquerors, through him that loved us," Rom. viii. 37.

"Think it not strange," for it is not. Suit your

thoughts to the experience and verdict of all times, and to the warnings that the Spirit of God hath given us in the Scriptures, and our Saviour himself from his own mouth, and in the example which he showed in his own person. But the point goes higher.

"Rejoice." Though we think not the sufferings "strange," yet, may we not well think that rule somewhat strange, to rejoice in them? No, it will be found as reasonable as the other, being duly considered. And it rests upon the same ground, which will bear both. "Inasmuch as ye are partakers of the sufferings of Christ."

If the children of God consider their trials, not in their natural bitterness, but in the sweet love from whence they spring, and the sweet fruits that spring from them, that we are our Lord's gold, and that he tries us in the furnace to purify us, as in the former verse, this may beget not only patience, but gladness even in the sufferings. But add we this, and truly it completes the reason of this way of rejoicing in our saddest sufferings, that in them we are "partakers of the sufferings of Christ."

So then, 1. Consider this twofold connected participation, of the sufferings of Christ and of the after-glory. 2. The present joy, even in sufferings, springing from that participation.

I need not tell you, that this communion in sufferings, is not in point of expiation, or satisfaction to Divine justice, which was the peculiar end of the sufferings of Christ *personal*, but not of the common sufferings of Christ *mystical*. "He bare our sins in his own body on the tree," and in bearing them, took them away: we bear his sufferings, as his body united to him by his Spirit. Those sufferings

which were his personal burden, we partake the sweet fruits of; they are accounted ours, and we are acquitted by them; but the endurance of them was his high and incommunicable task, in which none at all were with him. Our communion in these, as fully completed by himself in his natural body, is the ground of our comfort and joy in those sufferings that are completed in his mystical body, the church.

This is indeed our joy, that we have so light a burden, so sweet an exchange: the weight of sin quite taken off our backs, and all bound on his cross only, and our crosses, the badges of our conformity to him, laid indeed on our shoulders, but the great weight of them likewise held up by his hand, that they overpress us not. These fires of our trial may be corrective, and purgative of the remaining power of sin, and they are so intended; but Jesus Christ alone, in the sufferings of his own cross, was the burnt-offering, "the propitiation for our sins."

Now, although he hath perfectly satisfied for us, and saved us by his sufferings, yet this conformity to him in the way of suffering is most reasonable. Although our holiness doth not stand in point of law, nor come in at all in the matter of justifying us, yet we are called and appointed to holiness in Christ, as assimilating us to him, our glorious Head; and we do really receive it from him, that we may be like him. So these our sufferings bear a very congruous likeness to him, though in no way as an accession to his in expiation, yet as a part of his image; and therefore the apostle says, even in this respect, that we are "predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son," Rom. viii. 29. Is it fit that we should not follow where our Captain led,

and went first, but that he should lead through rugged, thorny ways, and we pass about to get away through flowery meadows? As his natural body shared with his head in his sufferings, so ought his body mystical to share with him, as its Head,—the buffetings and spittings on his face, the thorny crown on his head, a pierced side, nailed hands and feet: if we be parts of him, can we think that a body finding nothing but ease, and bathing in delights, can agree to a Head so tormented? I remember what that pious duke said at Jerusalem, when they offered to crown him king there, *Nolo auream, ubi Christus spineam:* "No crown of gold, where Christ Jesus was crowned with thorns."

This is the way we must follow, or else resolve to leave him; the way of the cross is the royal way to the crown. He said it, and reminded them of it again, that they might take the deep impression of it: "Remember what I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you: if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also," John xv. 20. And particularly in point of reproaches: "If they have called the master Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?" Matt. x. 25. A bitter scoff, an evil name, reproaches for Christ, why do these fret thee? They were a part of thy Lord's entertainment while he was here. Thou art, even in this, a "partaker of his sufferings," and in this way is he bringing thee forward to the partaking of his glory. That is the other thing.

"When his glory shall be revealed." Now that he is hidden, little of his glory is seen. It was hidden while he was on earth, and now it is hidden in heaven, where he is. And as for his body here, his

church, it hath no pompous dress, nor outward splendour; and the particular parts of it, the saints, are poor despised creatures, the very refuse of men in outward respects and common esteem. So he himself is not seen, and his followers, the more they are seen and looked on by the world's eye, the more meanness appears. True, as in the days of his humiliation some rays were breaking forth through the veil of his flesh and the cloud of his low, despicable condition, thus it is sometimes with his followers: a glance of his image strikes the very eye of the world, and forces some acknowledgment and a kind of reverence in the ungodly; but, commonly, Christ and his followers are covered with all the disgraces and ignominies the world can put on them. But there is a day wherein he will appear, and it is at hand; and then "He shall be glorious," even in his despised "saints," and "admired in them that believe," 2 Thess. i. 10; how much more in the matchless brightness of his own glorious person!

In the mean time, he is hidden, and they are hidden in him: "Our life is hid with Christ in God," Col. iii. 3. The world sees nothing of his glory and beauty, and even his own see not much; they have but a little glimmering of him, and of their own happiness in him; know little of their own high condition, and what they are born to. But in that bright day, he shall shine forth in his royal dignity, and "every eye shall see him," and be overcome with his splendour. Terrible shall it be to those that formerly despised him and his saints, but to them it shall be the gladdest day that ever arose upon them, a day that shall never set or be benighted; the day they so much longed and looked out for, the full accomplishment of all their hopes and

desires. Oh, how dark were all our days without the hope of this day!

Then, says the apostle, ye shall rejoice with exceeding joy; and to the end you may not fall short of that joy in the participation of glory, fall not back from a cheerful progress in the communion of those sufferings that are so closely linked with it, and will so surely lead unto it, and end in it. For in this the apostle's expression, this glory and joy is set before them, as the great matter of their desires and hopes, and the certain end of their present sufferings.

Now, upon these grounds, the admonition will appear reasonable, and not too great a demand, "to rejoice" even "in sufferings."

It is true, that passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews, ch. xii. 11, opposes present affliction to joy. But, 1. If you mark, it is but in the appearance, or outward visage, "It seemeth not to be matter of joy, but of grief." To look upon, it hath not a smiling countenance; yet joy may be under it. And, 2. Though to the flesh it is what it seems, grief, and not joy, yet there may be under it spiritual joy; yea, the affliction itself may help and advance that joy. 3. Through the natural sense of it, there will be some allay or mixture of grief, so that the joy cannot be pure and complete, but yet there may be joy even in it. This the apostle here clearly grants: "Rejoice" now "in" suffering that you may "rejoice exceedingly after" it, ἀγαλλιώμενοι, "leaping for joy." Doubtless, this joy, at present, is but a little parcel, a drop of that sea of joy. Now it is joy, but more is reserved. Then "they shall leap for joy." Yet, even at present, rejoice in "trial," yea, in "fiery trial." This may be done. The children of God are not called to so sad a life as the world

imagines: besides what is laid up for them in heaven, they have, even here, their rejoicings and songs in their distresses, as those prisoners had their psalms even at midnight, after their stripes, and in their chains, before they knew of a sudden deliverance, Acts xvi. 25. True, there may be a darkness within, clouding all the matter of their joy, but even that darkness is the seed-time of after-joy: light is sown in that darkness, and shall spring up; and not only shall they have a rich crop at full harvest, but even some first-fruits of it here, in pledge of the harvest.

And this they ought to expect, and to seek after with minds humble and submissive as to the measure and time of it, that they may be partakers of spiritual joy, and may by it be enabled to go patiently, yea, cheerfully, through the tribulations and temptations that lie in their way homeward. And for this end they ought to endeavour after a more clear discerning of their interest in Christ, that they may know they partake of him, and so, that in suffering they are partakers of his sufferings, and shall be partakers of his glory.

Many afflictions will not cloud and obstruct this, so much as one sin; therefore, if ye would walk cheerfully, be most careful to walk holily. All the winds about the earth make not an earthquake, but only that within.

Now this joy is grounded on this communion, (1.) In sufferings; then, (2.) In glory.

(1.) Even in sufferings themselves. It is a sweet, a joyful thing to be a sharer with Christ in any thing. All enjoyments wherein he is not, are bitter to a soul that loves him, and all sufferings with him are sweet. The worst things of Christ are more

truly delightful than the best things of the world; his afflictions are sweeter than their pleasures, his "reproach" more glorious than their honours, and more rich than their treasures, as Moses accounted them, Heb. xi. 26. Love delights in likeness and communion, not only in things otherwise pleasant, but in the hardest and harshest things, which have not any thing in them desirable, but only that likeness. So that this thought is very sweet to a heart possessed with this love: What does the world by its hatred, and persecutions, and revilings for the sake of Christ, but make me more like him, give me a greater share with him, in that which he did so willingly undergo for me? "When he was sought for to be made a king," as St. Bernard remarks, "he escaped; but when he was sought to be brought to the cross, he freely yielded himself." And shall I shrink and creep back from what he calls me to suffer for his sake? Yea, even all my other troubles and sufferings, I will desire to have stamped thus, with this conformity to the sufferings of Christ, in the humble, obedient, cheerful endurance of them, and the giving up my will to my Father's.

The following of Christ makes any way pleasant. His faithful followers refuse no march after him, be it through deserts, and mountains, and storms, and hazards, that will affright self-pleasing, easy spirits. Hearts kindled and actuated with the Spirit of Christ, will "follow him wheresoever he goeth."

As he speaks it for warning to his disciples, "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you," so he speaks it for comfort to them, and sufficient comfort it is, "If they hate you, they hated me before you," John xv. 18, 20.

(2.) Then add the other: see whither it tends. "He shall be revealed in his glory," and ye shall even overflow with joy in the partaking of that glory. Therefore, rejoice now in the midst of all your sufferings. Stand upon the advanced ground of the promises and the covenant of grace, and by faith look beyond this moment, and all that is in it, to that day wherein "everlasting joy shall be upon your heads," a crown of it, and "sorrow and mourning shall flee away," Isa. li. 11. Believe in this day, and the victory is won. Oh! that blessed hope, well fixed and exercised, would give other manner of spirits. What zeal for God would it not inspire! What invincible courage against all encounters! How soon will this pageant of the world vanish, that men are gazing on, these pictures and fancies of pleasures and honours, falsely so called, and give place to the real glory of the sons of God, when this blessed Son, who is God, shall be seen appearing in full majesty, and all his brethren in glory with him, all clothed in their robes! And if you ask, Who are they? Why, "these are they who came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb," Rev. vii. 14.

Ver. 14. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.
15. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer, or as a busy-body in other men's matters.
16. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.

The word is the Christian's magazine, both of instructions and of encouragements, whether for doing

or for suffering; and this Epistle is rich in both. Here, what the apostle had said concerning suffering in general, he specifies in the particular case of suffering reproaches. But this seems not to come up to the height of that expression which he hath used before: he spoke of *fiery* trial, but this of reproach seems rather fit to be called an *airy* trial, the blast of vanishing words. Yet, upon trial, it will be found to be, as here it is accounted, a very sharp, a "fiery trial."

First, then, of this particular kind of suffering; and, secondly, of the comfort and advice furnished against it.

"If ye be reproached." If we consider both the nature of the thing, and the strain of the Scriptures, we shall find that reproaches are amongst the sharpest sort of sufferings, and are indeed "fiery trials." "The tongue is a fire," says St. James, and reproaches are the flashes of that fire; they are a subtle kind of flame, like that lightning which, as naturalists say, crusheth the bones, and yet breaks not the flesh; they wound not the body, as do tortures and whips, but, through a whole skin, they reach the spirit of a man, and cut it. So, Psa. xlii. 10, "As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me." The fire of reproaches preys upon and dries up the "precious ointment of a good name," to use Solomon's comparison, Eccl. vii. 1. A good name is in itself good, a prime outward good; and take us according to our natural temper and apprehensions, according to which we feel things, most men are, and some more excessively, too tender and delicate in it. Although, truly, I take it rather to be a weakness than true greatness of spirit, as many fancy it, to depend much on the opinion of others,

and to feel it deeply, yet, I say, considering that it is commonly thus with men, and that there are the remains of this, as of other frailties, in the children of God, it cannot well be but reproaches will ordinarily much afflict men, and to some kind of spirits, possibly, be more grievous than great bodily pain or suffering.

And inasmuch as they are thus grievous, the Scripture accounts them so, and very usually reckons them amongst sufferings: it is apt to name them more than any other kind of suffering, and that with good reason, not only for their piercing nature, as we have said, but withal for their frequency and multitude; and some things we suffer do, as flies, more trouble by their number than by their weight.

Now, there is no one kind of suffering, of such constancy, and commonness, and abundance, as reproaches are. When other persecutions cease, yet these continue; when all other fires of martyrdom are put out, these burn still. In all times and places, the malignant world is ready to revile religion: not only avowed enemies of it, but the greatest part even of those that make a vulgar profession of it: they that outwardly receive the "form" of religion, are yet, many of them, inwardly haters of "the power" of it, and Christians who are such merely in name, will scorn and reproach those that are Christians indeed.

And this is done with such ease by every one, that these arrows fly thick: every one that hath a tongue can shoot them, even base "abjects," Psa. xxxv. 15, and "the drunkards make songs," as Jeremiah complains. The meanest sort can reach this point of persecution, and be active in it against the children of God. They who cannot or dare not

offer them any other injury, will not fear nor spare to let fly a taunt or bitter word. So that, whereas other sufferings are rarer, these meet them daily:—"While they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?" Psa. xlii. 10.

We see, then, how justly reproaches are often mentioned amongst and beyond other trials, and accounted persecution. See Matt. v. 10, 11, "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake." In the history of the casting out of Hagar and her son, Gen. xxi. 9, all we find laid to Ishmael's charge is, "Sarah saw him mocking." And as "he that was born after the flesh" did then, in this manner, "persecute him that was born after the Spirit," even so it is now, Gal. iv. 29. And thus are reproaches mentioned amongst the sufferings of Christ in the gospel, and not as the least: the railings and mockings that were darted at him, and fixed to the cross, are mentioned more than the very nails that fixed him. And so, Heb. xii. 2, "The shame" of the cross: though he was above it, and despised it, yet that "shame" added much to the burden of it. So, ver. 3, "Consider him who endured the contradiction of sinners."

Now the other thing is, that this is the lot of Christians, as it was of Christ. And why should they look for more kindness and better usage, and think to find acclamations and applauses from the world, which so vilified their Lord? Oh, no! The vain heart must be weaned from these, to follow Christ. If we will indeed follow him, it must be tamed to share with him in this point of suffering, not only mistakes and misconstructions, but bitter scoffings and reproaches. Why should not our

minds ply and fold to this upon that very reason which he so reasonably presses again and again on his disciples? "The servant is not greater than his Master." And, in reference to this very thing, he adds: "If they have called the Master Beelzebub, how much more will they speak so of his servants?" Matt. x. 24, 25.

Inference 1. Seeing it is thus, I shall first press upon the followers of Christ the apostle's rule here, to keep their suffering spotless, that it may not be comfortless. Resolve to endure it, but resolve, likewise, that it shall be on your part innocent suffering. "Suffer not as evil-doers." Besides that the ways of wickedness are most unsuitable to your holy calling, look to the enmity about you, and gain, even out of that evil, this great good of more circumspect and holy walking. Recollect who you are and where you are, your own weakness and the world's wickedness. This our Saviour represents, and upon it gives that suitable rule: "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."—*Prudens simplicitas.* Know you not what exact eyes of others are upon you? Will you not thence learn exactly to eye yourselves, and all your ways, and seek of God, with David, "to be led in righteousness, because of your enemies, your observers?" Psa. xxvii. 11.

This is the rule here: ver. 16, "Suffer as Christians," holily and blamelessly, that the enemy may not know where to fasten his hold. As the wrestlers anointed their bodies, that the hands of their antagonists might not fasten upon them, thus, truly, they that walk and suffer as Christians, anointed with

the Spirit of Christ, their enemies cannot well fasten their hold upon them.

To you, therefore, who love the Lord Jesus, I recommend this especially, to be careful that all your reproaches may be indeed for Christ, and not for any thing in you unlike to Christ; that there be nothing save the matter of your rod. Keep the quarrel as clean and unmixed as you can, and this will advantage you much, both within and without, in the peace and firmness of your minds, and in the refutation of your enemies. This will make you "as a brazen wall," as the Lord speaks to the prophet: "they shall fight against you, but shall not prevail," Jer. xv. 20.

Keep far off from all impure, unholy ways. "Suffer not as evil-doers," no, nor as "busy-bodies." Be much at home, setting things at rights within your own breast, where there is so much work, and such daily need of diligence, and then you will find no leisure for unnecessary idle pryings into the ways and affairs of others; and further than your calling and the rules of Christian charity engage you, you will not interpose in any matters without you, nor be found proud and censorious, as the world is ready to call you.

Shun the appearances of evil; walk warily and prudently in all things. Be not heady, nor self-willed, no, not in the best thing. Walk not upon the utter brink and edge of your liberty, for then you shall be in danger of overpassing it. Things that are lawful may be inexpedient, and, in case there is fear of scandal, ought either to be wholly forborne, or used with much prudence and circumspection. Oh, study in all things to adorn the

gospel, and under a sense of your own unskilfulness and folly, beg wisdom from above, that "anointing that will teach you all things," much of that "Holy Spirit, that will lead you in the way of all truth;" and then, in that way, whatsoever may befall you, "suffer" it, and however you may be vilified and reproached, "happy are ye, for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you."

Inference 2. But if to be thus reproached is to be happy, then, certainly, their reproachers are not less unhappy. If on those resteth the "Spirit of glory and of God," what spirit is in these, but the spirit of Satan, and of shame and vileness? Who is the basest, most contemptible kind of person in the world? Truly, I think, an avowed contemner and mocker of holiness. Shall any such be found amongst us?

I charge you all in this name of Christ, that you do not entertain godless prejudices against the people of God. Let not your ears be open to, nor your hearts close with the calumnies and lies that may be flying abroad of them and their practices; much less open your mouths against them, or let any disgraceful word be heard from you. And when you meet with undeniable real frailties, know the "law of love," and practise it. Think—This is blameworthy, yet let me not turn it to the reproach of those persons, who, notwithstanding, may be sincere, much less to the reproach of other persons professing religion, and then cast it upon religion itself.

My brethren, beware of sharing with the ungodly in this tongue-persecution of Christians. There is a day at hand, wherein the Lord will make inquiry after these things. If we shall be made accountable for "idle words," as we are warned, Matt. xii. 36,

how much more for bitter malicious words uttered against any, especially against the saints of God, whom, however the world may reckon, he esteems his precious ones, his treasure! You that now can look on them with a scornful eye, which way shall you look when they shall be beautiful and glorious, and all the ungodly clothed with shame? Oh, do not reproach them, but rather come in and share with them in the way of holiness, and in all the sufferings and reproaches that follow it; for if you partake of their disgraces, you shall share in glory with them, in the day of their Lord's appearing.

The words contain two things, the evil of these reproaches supposed, and the good expressed. The evil supposed, that they are trials, and hot trials, has been treated of already. Now as to the good expressed.

"Happy are ye." Ye are happy even at present, in the very midst of them; they do not trouble your happy estate, yea, they advance it. Thus solid, indeed, is the happiness of the saints, that in the lowest condition it remains the same: in disgraces, in caves, in prisons and chains, cast them where you will, still they are happy. A diamond in the mire, sullied and trampled on, yet still retains its own worth. But this is more, that the very things which seem to make them miserable, do not only not do that, but, on the contrary, do make them the more happy: they are gainers by their losses, and attain more liberty by their thraldoms, and more honour by their disgraces, and more peace by their troubles. The world and all their enemies are exceedingly befooled in striving against them: not only can they not undo them, but by all their enmity and practices they do them pleasure, and raise them higher.

With what weapons shall they fight? How shall a Christian's enemies set upon him? Where shall they hit him, seeing that all the wrongs they do him, do indeed enrich and ennoble him, and that the more he is depressed, he flourishes the more. Certainly, the blessedness of a Christian is matchless and invincible.

But how holds this, that a Christian is "happy in reproaches, and by them?" It is not through their nature and virtue, for they are evil; so Matt. v. 11; but first, by reason of the cause; secondly, by reason of the accompanying and consequent comfort. I. By reason of the cause of these reproaches. This we have negatively at verse 15, "Not as an evil-doer;"—that stains thy holy profession, damps thy comfort, and clouds thy happiness, disprofits thee, and dishonours thy Lord. But the cause is stated positively, ver. 14, 16,—"for the name of Christ." And what is there so rough which that will not make pleasant, to suffer with Christ, and for Christ, who suffered so much and so willingly for thee? Hath he not gone through all before thee, and made all easy and lovely? Hath he not sweetened poverty and persecution, and hatred and disgraces, and death itself, perfumed the grave, and turned it from a pit of horror into a sweet resting-bed? And thus love of Christ judgeth: it thinks all lovely which is endured for him, is glad to meet with difficulties, and is ambitious of suffering for him. Scorn or contempt is a thing of hard digestion, but much inward heat of love digests it easily. Reproaches are bitter, but the reproaches of Christ are sweet. Take their true value, Heb. xi. 26, "The reproaches of Christ are greater riches than the treasures of Egypt;" his very worst things better

than the best of the world. A touch of Christ turns all into gold: his reproaches are riches, as it is expressed there, and "honour," as here. Happy! Not only afterwards shall ye be happy, but "happy are ye" at present; and that, not only in apprehension of that after happiness as sure, and as already present to faith realizing it, but even, 2. In that they now possess the presence and comforts of the Spirit.

"For the Spirit of glory." This accompanies disgraces for him; his Spirit, "the Spirit of glory and of God." With your sufferings goes the name of Christ, and the Spirit of Christ: take them thus, when reproaches are cast upon you for his name, and you are enabled to bear them by his Spirit. And surely his Spirit is most fit to support you under them, yea, to raise you above them. They are ignominious and inglorious, he is the Spirit of glory; they are human reproaches, he, the Divine Spirit, "the Spirit of glory and of God," that is, the glorious Spirit of God.

And this is the advantage: the less the Christian finds esteem and acceptance in the world, the more he turns his eye inward, to see what is there; and there he finds the world's contempt counterpoised by a weight of excellency and glory, even in this present condition, as the pledge of the glory before him. The reproaches be fiery; but the "Spirit of glory resteth upon you," doth not give you a passing visit, but stays within you, and is indeed yours. And in this the Christian can take comfort, and let the foul weather blow over, let all the scoffs and contempts abroad pass as they come, having a glorious Spirit within, such a guest honouring him with his presence, abode, and sweet fellowship, being, indeed, one with him. So that rich miser at Athens could say,—

when they scorned him in the streets, he went home to his bags, and hugging himself there at the sight, let them say what they would:—

> ——— Populus me sibilat; at mihi plaudo
> Ipse domi, simul ac nummos contemplor in arca.

How much more reasonably may the Christian say, "Let them revile and bark, I have riches and honour enough that they see not!" And this is what makes the world, as they are a malicious party, so to be an incompetent judge of the Christian's estate. They see the rugged unpleasant outside only; the rich inside their eye cannot reach. We were miserable indeed, were our comforts such as they could see.

And while this is the constant estate of a Christian, it is usually most manifested to him in the time of his greatest sufferings. Then, as we said, he naturally turns inward and sees it most, and accordingly finds it most. God making this happy supplement and compensation, that when his people have least of the world they have most of himself; when they are most covered with the world's disfavour, his favour shines brightest to them. As Moses, when he was in the cloud, had nearest access and speech with God; so when the Christian is most clouded with distresses and disgraces, then doth the Lord often show himself most clearly to him.

If you be indeed Christians, you will not be so much thinking, at any time, how you may be free from all sufferings and despisings, but rather, how you may go strongly and cheerfully through them. Lo, here is the way: seek a real and firm interest in Christ, and a participation of Christ's Spirit, and then a look to him will make all easy and delightful.

Thou wilt be ashamed within thyself to start back, or yield one foot, at the encounter of a taunt or reproach for him. Thou wilt think, For whom is it? Is it not for him who for my sake hid not his face from shame and spitting? And further, He died: now, how should I meet death for him, who shrink at the blast of a scornful word?

If you would know whether this his Spirit is and resteth in you, it cannot be better known than, 1. By that very love, ardent love to him, and high esteem of him, and from thence, a willingness, yea, a gladness to suffer any thing for him. 2. This "Spirit of glory" sets the heart on glory. True glory makes heavenly things excellent in our thoughts, and sets the world, the better and the worse, the honour and the dishonour of it, at a low rate.

The spirit of the world is a base, ignoble spirit, even the highest pitch of it. Theirs are but poor designs who are projecting for kingdoms, compared to those of the Christian, which ascend above all things under the sun, and above the sun itself, and therefore he is not shaken with the threats of the world, nor taken with its offers. Excellent is the answer which St. Basil gives, in the person of those martyrs, to that emperor who made them, as he thought, great proffers to draw them off: "Why," say they, "dost thou bid us so low as pieces of the world? We have learned to despise it all." This is not stupidity, nor an affected stoutness of spirit, but an humble sublimity, which the natural spirit of a man cannot reach unto.

But wilt thou say still, This stops me, I do not find this spirit in me; if I did, then I think I could be willing to suffer any thing. To this, for the present, I say no more than this: Dost thou desire

that Christ may be glorified, and couldst thou be content it were by thy suffering in any kind thou mayest be called to undergo for him? Art thou willing to give up thy own interest to study and follow Christ's, and to sacrifice thine own credit and name to advance his? Art thou unwilling to do any thing that may dishonour him, but not unwilling to suffer any thing that may honour him? Or wouldst thou be thus? Then be not disputing, but up and walk on in his strength.

Now, if any say, But his name is dishonoured by these reproaches—True, says the apostle, "on their part it is so, but not on yours." They that reproach you, do their best to make it reflect on Christ and his cause, but thus it is only on their part. You are sufferers for his name, and so you glorify it: your faith and patience, and your victory by these, do declare the power of Divine grace, and the efficacy of the gospel. These have made torturers ashamed, and induced some beholders to share with those who were tortured. Thus, though the profane world intends, as far as it can reach, to fix dishonour upon the profession of Christ, yet it sticks not; but on the contrary, he is glorified by your constancy.

And as the ignominy fastens not, but the glory from the endurance does, so Christians are obliged, and certainly are ready, according to the apostle's zeal, ver. 16, "to glorify God on this behalf," that, as he is glorified in them, so they may glorify and bless him who hath dignified them so; that whereas we might have been left to a sad sinking task, to have suffered for various guilts, our God hath changed the tenor and nature of our sufferings, and makes them to be "for the name of Christ."

Thus, a spiritual mind doth not swell on a conceit of constancy and courage, which is the readiest way of self-undoing, but acknowledges all to be "gift," even suffering: "To you it is given not only to believe, but to suffer," and so, "to bless him," on that behalf, Phil. i. 29. Oh! this love grows in suffering. See Acts v. 41, "They went away rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer shame for his name."

Consider, it is but a short while, and the wicked and their scoffs shall vanish; "they shall not be." This shame will presently be over, this disgrace is of short date, but the glory, and the "Spirit of glory," are eternal. What though thou shouldst be poor, and defamed, and despised, and be the common mark of scorn and all injuries, yet the end of them all is at hand. This is now thy part, but the scene shall be changed. Kings here, real ones, are in the deepest reality but stage kings; but when thou comest to alter the person thou now bearest, here is the odds; thou wast a fool in appearance, and for a moment, but thou shalt be truly a king for ever.

Ver. 17. For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?

There is not only perfect equity, but, withal, a comely proportion and beauty in all the ways of God, had we eyes opened to discern them, particularly in this point of the sufferings and afflictions of the church. The apostle here sets it before his brethren, "For the time is come," &c. In which words there is, 1. A parallel of the Lord's dealing with his own, and with the wicked. 2. A persuasion

to due compliance and confidence, on the part of his own, upon that consideration.

The parallel is in the *order* and the *measure* of punishing; and it is so that, for the order, it begins at the house of God, and ends upon the ungodly. And that carries in it this great difference in the measure, that it passes from the one on whom it begins, and rests on the other on whom it ends, and on whom the full weight of it lies for ever. It is so expressed, "What shall the end be," &c.; which imports, not only that judgment shall overtake them in the end, but that it shall be their end; they shall end in it, and it shall be endless upon them.

"The time is." Indeed the whole time of this present life is so, is the time of suffering and purifying for the church, compassed with enemies who will afflict her, and subject to those impurities which need affliction. The children of God are in their under-age here: all their time they are children, and have their frailties and childish follies; and therefore, though they are not always under the stroke of the rod, for that they were not able to endure, yet they are under the discipline and use of the rod all their time. And whereas the wicked escape till their day of full payment, the children of God are in this life chastised with frequent afflictions. And so, the time (ὁ καιρὸς) may here be taken according as the apostle St. Paul uses the same word, Rom. viii. 18, παθήματα τοῦ νῦν καίρου, "the sufferings of this present time."

But withal, it is true, and appears to be here implied, that there are particular set times, which the Lord chooses for the correcting of his church. He hath the days prefixed and written in his ephemerides, hath his days of correcting, wherein he goes

round from one church to another. We thought it would never come to us, but we have now found the smart of it.

And here the apostle may probably mean the times of those hot persecutions that were then begun, and continued, though with some intervals, for two or three ages. Thus, in the sixth chapter of the Apocalypse, after the "white horse," immediately follow at his heels, "the red," and "the black," and "the pale horse." And as it was upon the first publishing of the gospel, so usually upon the restoring of it, or upon remarkable reformations of the church, and revivings of religion, follow sharp and searching trials. As the lower cause of this is the rage and malice of Satan, and of the ungodly world acted and stirred by him, against the purity and prevalence of religion, so it is from a higher hand for better ends. The Lord will discover the multitudes of hypocrites and empty professors, who will at such a time readily abound, when religion is upon an advancing way, and the stream of it runs strong. Now, by the counter-current of troubles, such fall back, and are carried away. And the truth of grace, in the hearts of believers, receives advantage from these hazards and sufferings; they are put to fasten their hold the better on Christ, to seek more experience of the real and sweet consolations of the gospel, which may uphold them against the counter-blasts of suffering. Thus is religion made a more real and solid thing in the hearts of true believers: they are entered to that way of receiving Christ and his cross together, that they may see their bargain, and not think it a surprise.

"Judgment." Though all sufferings are not such, yet, commonly, there is that unsuitable and

unwary walking among Christians, that even their sufferings for the cause of God, though unjust from men, are from God just punishments of their miscarriages towards him, in their former ways; their self-pleasing and earthliness, having too high a relish for the delights of this world, forgetting their inheritance and home, and conforming themselves to the world, walking too much like it.

"Must begin." The church of God is punished, while the wicked are free and flourish in the world, possibly all their days; or, if judgment reach them here, yet it is later; it "begins at the house of God." 1. This holds in those who profess his name, and are of the visible church, compared with them who are without the pale of it, and are its avowed enemies. 2. In those who profess a desire of a more religious and holy course of life within the church, compared with the profane multitude. 3. In those who are indeed more spiritual and holy, and come nearer unto God, compared with others who fall short of that measure. In all these respects it holds, that the Lord doth more readily exercise them with afflictions, and correct their wanderings, than any others.

And this truly is most reasonable; and the reason lies in the very name given to the church, "the house of God." For,

1. There is equity in such a proceeding. The sins of the church have their peculiar aggravations, which fall not upon others. That which is simply a sin in strangers to God, is, in his people, the breach of a known and received law, and a law daily unfolded and set before them: yea, it is against their oath of allegiance; it is perfidy and breach of covenant, committed both against the clearest light,

and the strictest bonds, and the highest mercies. And still the more particular the profession of his name, and the testimonies of his love, these make sin the more sinful, and the punishment of it the more reasonable. The sins of the church are all twice dipped, *dibapha*, have a double dye, Isa. i. 18. They are breaches of the law, and they are, besides, ungrateful and disloyal breaches of promise.

2. As there is unquestionable equity, so there is evident congruity in this. God is Ruler of all the world, but particularly of his church, here called "his house," wherein he hath a special residence and presence: and therefore it is most suitable that there he be specially observed and obeyed, and if disobeyed, that he take notice of it, and punish it; that he suffer not himself to be dishonoured to his face by those of his own house. And, therefore, whosoever escape, his own shall not. "You only have I known, of all the families of the earth: therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities," Amos iii. 2. It is fit that he who righteously judges and rules all nations should make his justice most evident and exemplary in his own house, where it may best be remarked, and where it will best appear how impartial he is in punishing sin. So a king, as the psalmist, Psa. ci. 2, that he may rule the land well, makes his own house exemplary. It is, you know, one special qualification of a bishop and pastor, to be "one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection; for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" 1 Tim. iii. 4, 5. Now, this, therefore, more eminently appears in the supreme Lord of the church; he rules it as his own house, and therefore when he finds disobedience

there, he will first punish that. So he clears himself, and the wicked world being afterwards punished, their mouths are stopped with the preceding punishment of the church. Will he not spare his own? Yea, they shall be first scourged. "What then shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel?"

And indeed, the purity of his nature, if it be every where contrary to all sinful impurity, cannot but most appear in his peculiar dwelling-house; that he will especially have neat and clean. If he hate sin all the world over, where it is nearest to him he hates it most, and testifies his hatred of it most: he will not endure it in his presence. As cleanly, neat persons cannot well look upon any thing that is nasty, much less will they suffer it to come near them, or touch them, or to continue in their presence in the house where they dwell: so the Lord, "who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity," will not abide it within his own doors; and the nearer any come to him, the less can he endure any unholiness or sinful pollution in them. "He will be sanctified in all that come nigh him," Lev. x. 3, so especially in his ministers. Oh, how pure ought they to be, and how provoking and hateful to him are their impurities! Therefore, in that commission to the destroyers, Ezek. ix. 6, to which place the apostle here may have some reference, "Go," says he, "slay the old and the young, and begin at my sanctuary." They were the persons who had polluted his worship, and there the first stroke lighted. And in a spiritual sense, because all his people are his own elect priesthood, and should be "holiness to the Lord;" when they are not really so, and do not sanctify him in their walking, he sanctifies

himself, and declares his holiness in his judgments on them.

3. There is mercy in this dispensation too; even under the habit of judgment, love walks secretly, and works. So loving and so wise a Father will not undo his children by sparing the rod, but "because he loves, rebukes and chastens:" see Heb. xii. 6; Prov. iii. 11, 12; Rev. iii. 19. His church is his house; therefore, that he may delight in it, and take pleasure to dwell in it, and make it happy with his presence, he will have it often washed and made clean, and the filth and rubbish scoured and purged out of it; this argues his gracious purpose of abiding in it.

And as he doth it that he may delight in his people, so he doth it that they may delight in him, and in him alone. He embitters the breast of the world, to wean them; makes the world hate them, that they may the more easily hate it; suffers them not to settle upon it, and fall into a complacency with it, but makes it unpleasant to them by many and sharp afflictions, that they may with the more willingness come off and be untied from it, and that they may remember home the more, and seek their comforts above; that, finding so little below, they may turn unto him, and delight themselves in communion with him. That the sweet incense of their prayers may ascend the more thick, he kindles those fires of trial to them. For though it should not be so, yet so it is, that in times of ease they would easily grow remiss and formal in their duty.

He is gracious and wise, knows what he does with them, and "the thoughts he thinks towards them," Jer. xxix. 11. All is for their advantage, for the purifying of their iniquities, Isa. xxvii. 9.

He purges out their impatience, and earthliness, and self-will, and carnal security; and thus refines them for vessels of honour. We see in a jeweller's shop, that as there are pearls and diamonds, and other precious stones, so there are files, cutting instruments, and many sharp tools, for their polishing; and while they are in the workhouse, they are continual neighbours to them, and often come under them. The church is God's jewellery, his workhouse, where his jewels are polishing for his palace and house; and those he especially esteems and means to make most resplendent, he hath oftenest his tools upon.

Thus observe, as it is in the church compared to other societies, so it is in a congregation or family; if there be one more diligently seeking after God than the rest, he shall be liable to meet with more trials, and be oftener under afflictions, than any of the company, either under contempt and scorn, or poverty and sickness, or some one pressure or other, outward or inward. And those inward trials are the nearest and sharpest which the world sees least, and yet the soul feels most. And yet all these, both outward and inward, have love, unspeakable love in them all, being designed to purge and polish them, and, by the increasing of grace, to fit them for glory.

Inference 1. Let us not be so foolish as to promise ourselves impunity on account of our relation to God as his church in covenant with him. If once we thought so, surely our experience hath undeceived us. And let not what we have suffered harden us, as if the worst were past. We may rather fear it is but a pledge and beginning of sharper judgment. Why do we not consider our

unhumbled and unpurified condition, and tremble before the Lord? Would we save him a labour, he would take it well. Let us purify our souls, that he may not be put to further purifying by new judgments. Were we busy reading our present condition, we should see very legible foresigns of further judgments; as for instance: 1. The Lord taking away his eminent and worthy servants, who are as the very pillars of the public peace and welfare, and taking away counsel, and courage, and union from the rest; forsaking us in our meetings, and leaving us in the dark to grope and rush one upon another. 2. The dissensions and jarrings in the state and church, are likely, from imagination, to bring it to a reality. These unnatural burnings threaten new fires of public judgments to be kindled amongst us. 3. That general despising of the gospel, and abounding of profaneness throughout the land, not yet purged, but, as our great sin remaining in us, calls for more fire and more boiling. 4. The general coldness and deadness of spirit; the want of zeal for God, and of the communion of saints, that mutual stirring up of one another to holiness; and, which is the source of all, the restraining of prayer, a frozen benumbedness in that so necessary work, that preventer of judgments, that binder of the hands of God from punishments, and opener of them for the pouring forth of mercies. Oh! this is a sad condition in itself, though it portended no further judgment, the Lord hiding himself, and the spirit of zeal and prayer withdrawn, and scarcely any lamenting it, or so much as perceiving it! Where are our days either of solemn prayer or praises, as if there were cause for neither! And yet, there is a clear cause for both. Truly, my brethren, we

have need, if ever we had, to bestir ourselves. Are not these kingdoms, at this present, brought to the extreme point of their highest hazard? And yet, who lays it to heart?

Inference 2. Learn to put a right construction on all God's dealings with his church, and with thy soul. With regard to his church, there may be a time wherein thou shalt see it not only tossed, but, to thy thinking, covered and swallowed up with tears: but wait a little, it shall arrive safe. This is a common stumbling-stone, but walk by the light of the word, and the eye of faith looking on it, and thou shalt pass by and not stumble at it. The church mourns, and Babylon sings—"sits as a queen;" but for how long? She shall "come down and sit in the dust;" and Sion shall be glorious, "and put on her beautiful garments," while Babylon shall not look for another revolution to raise her again; no, she shall never rise. "And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great mill-stone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all," Rev. xviii. 21.

Be not hasty: take God's work together, and do not judge of it by parcels. It is indeed all wisdom and righteousness; but we shall best discern the beauty of it, when we look on it in the frame, when it shall be fully completed and finished, and our eyes enlightened to take a fuller and clearer view of it than we can have here. Oh, what wonder, what endless wondering will it then command!

We read of Joseph hated, and sold, and imprisoned, and all most unjustly, yet because, within a leaf or two, we find him freed and exalted, and his brethren coming as supplicants to him, we are

satisfied. But when we look on things which are for the present cloudy and dark, our short-sighted, hasty spirits cannot learn to wait a little, till we see the other side, and what end the Lord makes. We see "judgment beginning at the house of God," and this perplexes us while we consider not the rest, "What shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel?" God begins the judgment on his church for a little time, that it may end and rest upon his enemies for ever. And indeed, he leaves the wicked last in the punishment, that he may make use of them for the punishment of his church. They are "his rod," Isa. x. 5, but when he hath done that work with them, they are "broken and burnt," and that, when they are at the height of their insolence and boasting, not knowing what hand moves them, and smites his people with them for a while, "till the day of their consuming come," ver. 16, 24, 25. Let the vile enemy that hath shed our blood, and insulted over us, rejoice in their present impunity, and in men's procuring it, and pleading for it;* there is another hand whence we may look for justice. And though it may be, that the judgment begun at us, is not yet ended, and that we may yet further, and that justly, find them our scourge, yet certainly, we may and ought to look beyond that, unto the end of the Lord's work, which shall be the ruin of his enemies, and the peace of his people, and the glory of his name.

"Of them that obey not the gospel." The end

* I am ready to believe this refers to the escape of many who had deserved the severest punishments, for their part in the grand Irish rebellion, but were screened by the favour of some great men in the reign of King Charles II.—*Dr. Doddridge.*

of all the ungodly is terrible, but especially the end of such as heard the gospel, and have not received and obeyed it.

The word ἀπειθούντων hath in it both unbelief and disobedience; and these are inseparable. Unbelief is the grand point of disobedience in itself, and the spring of all other disobedience; and the pity is, that men will not believe it to be thus.

They think it an easy and a common thing to believe. Who doth not believe? Oh, but rather, who does? "Who hath believed our report?" Were our own misery, and the happiness that is in Christ, believed, were the riches of Christ and the love of Christ believed, would not this persuade men to forsake their sins and the world, in order to embrace him?

But men run away with an extraordinary fancy of believing, and do not deeply consider what news the gospel brings, and how much it concerns them. Sometimes, it may be, they have a sudden thought of it, and they think, I will think on it better at some other time. But when comes that time? One business steps in after another, and shuffles it out. Men are not at leisure to be saved.

Observe the phrase, "The gospel of God." It is his embassy of peace to men, the riches of his mercy and free love opened and set forth, not simply to be looked upon, but laid hold on; the glorious holy God declaring his design of agreement with man in his own Son, his blood streaming forth in it to wash away uncleanness. And yet this gospel is not obeyed! Surely, the conditions of it must be very hard, and the commands intolerably grievous, that they are not hearkened to. Why, judge you if they be. The great command is, to receive that salvation;

and the other is this, to love that Saviour; and there is no more. Perfect obedience is not now the thing; and the obedience which is required, that love makes sweet and easy to us, and acceptable to him. This is proclaimed to all who hear the gospel, but the greatest part refuse it: they love themselves, and their lusts, and this present world, and will not change, and so, they perish!

They perish—What is that? What is their end? I will answer that but as the apostle doth, and that is even by asking the question over again, "What shall be their end?"

There is no speaking of it; a curtain is drawn: silent wonder expresses it best, telling that it cannot be expressed. How then shall it be endured? It is true, that there are resemblances used in Scripture, giving us some glance of it. We hear of a "burning lake, a fire that is not quenched, and a worm that dies not," Isa. lxvi. 24; Mark ix. 44; Rev. xxi. 8. But these are but shadows to the real misery of them that obey not the gospel. Oh, to be filled with the wrath of God, the ever-living God, for ever! What words or thoughts can reach it? Oh, eternity, eternity! Oh that we did believe it.

This same parallel of the Lord's dealing with the righteous and the wicked, is continued in the following verse in other terms, for the clearer expression and deeper impression of it.

Ver. 18. And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

It is true, then, that they are scarcely saved; even they that endeavour to walk uprightly in the

ways of God, that is, "the righteous," they are "scarcely saved." This imports not any uncertainty or hazard in the thing itself as to the end, in respect of the purpose and performance of God, but only, the great difficulties and hard encounters in the way; that they go through so many temptations and tribulations, so many "fightings without, and fears within." The Christian is so simple and weak, and his enemies are so crafty and powerful, the oppositions of the wicked world, their hatreds, and scorns, and molestations, the sleights and violence of Satan, and, worst of all, the strength of his own corruptions; and by reason of abounding corruption, there is such frequent, almost continual need of purifying by afflictions and trials, that he has need to be still under physic, and is of necessity at some times drained and brought so low, that there is scarcely strength or life remaining in him.

And truly, all outward difficulties would be but matter of ease, would be as nothing, were it not for the encumbrance of lusts and corruptions within. Were a man to meet disgraces and sufferings for Christ, how easily would he go through them, yea, and rejoice in them, were he rid of the fretting impatience, the pride, and self-love, of his own carnal heart! These clog and trouble him worst, and he cannot shake them off, nor prevail against them without much pains, many prayers, and tears; and many times, after much wrestling, he scarcely finds that he hath gained any ground; yea, sometimes he is foiled, and cast down by them.

And so, in all other duties, such a fighting and continual combat, with a revolting, backsliding heart, the flesh still pulling and dragging downwards! When he would mount up, he finds him-

self as a bird with a stone tied to its foot; he hath wings that flutter to be upwards, but is pressed down by the weight fastened to him. What struggling with wanderings and deadness in hearing, and reading, and prayer! And what is most grievous, is, that by their unwary walking, and the prevailing of some corruption, they grieve the Spirit of God, and provoke him to hide his face, and withdraw his comforts. How much pain to attain any thing, any particular grace of humility, or meekness, or self-denial; and if any thing be attained, how hard to keep and maintain it against the contrary party! How often are they driven back to their old point. If they do but cease from striving a little, they are carried back by the stream. And what returns of doubtings and misbelief, after they thought they were got somewhat above them, insomuch that sometimes they are at the point of giving over, and thinking it will never be for them. And yet through all these they are brought safe home. There is another strength than theirs which bears them up, and brings them through. But these things, and many more of this nature, argue the difficulty of their course, and that it is not so easy a thing to come to heaven as most imagine it.

Inference. Thou that findest so little stop and conflict in it, who goest thy round of external duties, and all is well, art no more troubled; thou hast need to inquire, after a long time spent in this way, Am I right? Have I not yet to begin? Surely, this looks not like the way to heaven, as it is described in the Scripture: it is too smooth and easy to be right.

And if the way of the righteous be so hard, then how hard shall be the end of the ungodly sinner that walks in sin with delight! It were strange if they

should be at such pains, and with great difficulty attain their end, and he should come in amongst them in the end; they were fools indeed. True, if it were so. But what if it be not so? Then the wicked man is the fool, and shall find that he is, when he shall not be able to "stand in the judgment." Where shall he appear, when, to the end he might not appear, he would be glad to be smothered under the weight of the hills and mountains, if they could shelter him from appearing?

And what is the aim of all this which we have spoken, or can speak on this subject, but that ye may be moved to take into deeper thoughts the concernment of your immortal souls? Oh that you would be persuaded! Oh that you would betake yourselves to Jesus Christ, and seek salvation in him! Seek to be covered with his righteousness, and to be led by his Spirit in the ways of righteousness. That will seal to you the happy certainty of the end, and overcome for you all the difficulties of the way. What is the gospel of Christ preached for? What was the blood of Christ shed for? Was it not, that by receiving him we might escape condemnation? Nay, this drew him from heaven: "He came that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly," John x. 10.

Ver. 19. Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

Nothing doth so establish the mind amidst the rollings and turbulence of present things, as both a look above them, and a look beyond them; above them to the steady and good hand by which they

are ruled, and beyond them to the sweet and beautiful end to which by that hand they shall be brought. This the apostle lays here as the foundation of that patience and peace in troubles, wherewith he would have his brethren furnished. And thus he closes this chapter in these words: "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator."

The words contain the true principle of Christian patience and tranquillity of mind in the sufferings of this life, expressing both wherein it consists, and what are the grounds of it.

1. It lies in this, "committing the soul unto God." The word ἐν ἀγαθοποιΐα, which is added, is a true qualification of this, that it be in well-doing, according to the preceding doctrine, which the apostle gives clearly and largely, ver. 15, 16. If men would have inward peace amidst outward trouble, they must walk by the rule of peace, and keep strictly to it. If you would commit your soul to the keeping of God, know that he is a holy God, and an unholy soul that walks in any way of wickedness, whether known or secret, is no fit commodity to put into his pure hand to keep. Therefore, as you would have this confidence to give your holy God the keeping of your soul, and that he may accept of it, and take it off your hand, beware of wilful pollutions and unholy ways. Walk so as you may not discredit your Protector, and move him to be ashamed of you, and disclaim you. Shall it be said that you live under his shelter, and yet walk inordinately? As this cannot well be, you cannot well believe it to be. Loose ways will loosen your hold of him, and confidence in him. You will be driven

to question your interest, and to think, Surely I do but delude myself: can I be under his safeguard, and yet follow the course of the world, and my corrupt heart? Certainly, let who will be so, HE will not be a guardian and patron of wickedness. No, "He is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, nor shall evil dwell with him," Psa. v. 4. If thou give thy soul to him to keep, upon the terms of liberty to sin, he will turn it out of his doors and remit it back to thee to look to as thou wilt thyself. Yea, in the ways of sin, thou dost indeed steal it back, and carriest it out from him; thou puttest thyself out of the compass of his defence, goest without the trenches, and art, at thine own hazard, exposed to armies of mischiefs and miseries.

Inference. This, then, is primarily to be looked to: you that would have safety in God in evil times, beware of evil ways; for in these it cannot be. If you will be safe in him, you must stay with him, and in all your ways keep within him "as your fortress." Now, in the ways of sin you run out from him.

Hence it is we have so little established confidence in God in times of trial. We take ways of our own, and will be gadding, and so we are surprised and taken, as they that are often venturing out into the enemy's reach, and cannot stay within the walls. It is no idle repetition, Psa. xci. 1, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." He that wanders not, but stays there, shall find himself there hidden from danger. They that rove out from God in their ways, are disquieted and tossed with fears; this is the "fruit of their own ways;" but the soul that is indeed given to him to keep, keeps near him.

Study pure and holy walking, if you would have your confidence firm, and have boldness and joy in God. You will find that a little sin will shake your trust and disturb your peace more than the greatest sufferings: yea, in those sufferings your assurance and joy in God will grow and abound most if sin be kept out. That is the trouble-feast which disquiets the conscience, which, while it continues good, is a "continual feast." So much sin as gets in, so much peace will go out. Afflictions cannot break in upon it to break it, but sin doth. All the winds which blow about the earth from all points, stir it not; only that within the bowels of it makes the earthquake.

I do not mean that for infirmities a Christian ought to be discouraged. But take heed of walking in any way of sin, for that will unsettle thy confidence. Innocency and holy walking make the soul of a sound constitution, which the counterblasts of affliction wear not out, nor alter. Sin makes it so sickly and crazy, that it can endure nothing. Therefore, study to keep your consciences pure, and they shall be peaceable; yea, in the worst times commonly most peaceable and best furnished with spiritual confidence and comfort.

"Commit the keeping of their souls." The Lord is an entire protector. He keeps the bodies, yea, all that belongs to the believer, and, as much as is good for him, makes all safe, "keeps all his bones, not one of them is broken," Psa. xxxiv. 20; yea, says our Saviour, "The very hairs of your head are numbered," Matt. x. 30. But that which, as in the believer's account, and in God's account, so certainly in itself is most precious, is principally committed and received into his keeping, "their souls." They would most gladly be secured in that here, and that

shall be safe in the midst of all hazards. Their chief concern is, that whatsoever be lost, this may not: this is the jewel, and therefore the prime care is of this. If the soul be safe, all is well; it is riches enough. "What shall it profit a man, though he gain the whole world," says our Saviour, "and lose his own soul?" Mark viii. 36. And so what shall it disprofit a man, though he lose the whole world, if he gain his soul? Nothing at all.

When times of trial come, oh, what a bustle to hide this and that; to flee and carry away and make safe that which is but trash and rubbish to the precious soul; but how few thoughts of that! Were we in our senses, that would be all at all times, not only in trouble, but in days of peace. Oh, how shall I make sure about my soul? Let all go as it may, can I but be secured and persuaded in that point, I desire no more.

Now, the way is this, "commit them to God;" this many say, but few do. Give them into his hand, "lay them up" there, (so the word is,) and they are safe, and may be quiet and composed.

"In patience possess your souls," says our Saviour, Luke xxi. 19. Impatient, fretting souls are out of themselves; their owners do not possess them. Now the way to possess them ourselves in patience, is thus to commit them to him in confidence; for then only we possess them when he keeps them. They are easily disquieted and shaken in pieces while they are in our own hands, but in his hand they are above the reach of dangers and fears.

Inference. Learn from hence what is the proper act of faith; it rolls the soul over on God, ventures it into his hand, and rests satisfied concerning it,

being there. And there is no way but this to be quiet within, to be impregnable and immovable in all assaults, and fixed in all changes, believing in his free love. Therefore, be persuaded to resolve on that; not doubting and disputing, Whether shall I believe, or not? Shall I think he will suffer me to lay my soul upon him to keep so unworthy, so guilty a soul? Were it not presumption! Oh, what sayest thou? Why dost thou thus dishonour him, and disquiet thyself? If thou hast a purpose to walk in any way of wickedness, indeed thou art not for him; yea, thou comest not near him to give him thy soul. But wouldst thou have it delivered from sin rather than from trouble; yea, rather than from hell? Is that the chief safety thou seekest, to be kept from iniquity, from thine own iniquity, thy beloved sins? Dost thou desire to dwell in him, and walk with him? Then, whatsoever be thy guiltiness and unworthiness, come forward, and give him thy soul to keep. If he should seem to refuse it, press it on him. If he stretch not forth his hand, lay it down at his foot, and leave it there, and resolve not to take it back. Say, Lord, thou hast made us these souls, thou callest for them again to be committed to thee: here is one. It is unworthy, but what soul is not so? It is most unworthy, but therein will the riches of thy grace appear most in receiving it. And thus leave it with him, and know he will make thee a good account of it. Now should you lose goods, or credit, or friends, or life itself, it imports not; the main concern is sure, if so be thy soul is out of hazard. "I suffer these things for the gospel," says the apostle; "nevertheless I am not ashamed"—Why?—"for I know whom I have trusted, and am persuaded that he is

able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day," 2 Tim. i. 12.

II. The ground of this confidence is in these two things, the ability and the fidelity of him in whom we trust. There is much in a persuasion of the power of God: though few think they question that there is in us secret, undiscovered unbelief, even in that point. Therefore the Lord so often makes mention of it in the prophets. See Isa. i. 3, &c. And, in this point, the apostle Paul is particularly express: "I am persuaded that he is able to keep," &c. So this apostle, "Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time," chap. i. ver. 5. This is very needful to be considered in regard of the many and great oppositions, and dangers, and powerful enemies, that seek after our souls; "He is able to keep them, for he is stronger than all, and none can pluck them out of his hand," says our Saviour, John x. 29. This the apostle here implies in that word "Creator;" if he was able to give them being, surely he is able to keep them from perishing. This relation of a Creator implies likewise a benign propension and good-will to the works of his hands: if he gave them us at first, when once they were not, forming them out of nothing, will he not give us them again, being put into his hand for safety?

And as he is powerful, he is no less faithful, "a faithful Creator;" truth itself. Those who believe on him, he never deceives nor disappoints. Well might St. Paul say, "I know whom I have trusted." Oh, the advantage of faith! It engages the truth and the power of God: his royal word and honour lies upon it to preserve the soul that faith gives him

in keeping. If he remain able and faithful to perform his word, that soul shall not perish.

There are in the words, other two grounds of quietness of spirit in sufferings. It is according to the will of God. The believing soul, subjected and levelled to that will, complying with his good pleasure in all, cannot have a more powerful persuasive than this, that all is ordered by his will. This settled in the heart would settle it much, and make it even in all things; not only to know, but wisely and deeply to consider that it is thus, that all is measured in heaven, every drachm of thy troubles weighed by that skilful hand which doth all things by weight, number, and measure.

And then consider him as thy God and Father, who hath taken special charge of thee, and of thy soul: thou hast given it to him, and he hath received it. And upon this consideration, study to follow his will in all, to have no will but his. This is thy duty and thy wisdom. Nothing is gained by spurning and struggling, but to hurt and vex thyself; but by complying, all is gained—sweet peace. It is the very secret, the mystery of solid peace within, to resign all to his will, to be disposed of at his pleasure, without the least contrary thought. And thus, like two-faced pictures, those sufferings and troubles, and whatsoever else, while beheld on the one side as painful to the flesh, hath an unpleasant visage, yet, go about a little and look upon it as thy Father's will, and then it is smiling, beautiful, and lovely. This I would recommend to you, not only for temporals, as easier there, but in spiritual things, your comforts and sensible enlargements, to love all that he does. It is the sum of Christianity to have thy will cruci-

fied, and the will of thy Lord thy only desire. Whether joy or sorrow, sickness or health, life or death—in all, in all, "Thy will be done."

The other ground of quietness is contained in the first word, which looks back on the foregoing discourse, "Wherefore"—what? Seeing that your reproachings and sufferings are not endless, yea, that they are short, they shall end, quickly end, and end in glory, be not troubled about them, overlook them. The eye of faith will do it. A moment gone, and what are they? This is the great cause of our disquietness in present troubles and griefs: we forget their end. We are affected by our condition in this present life, as if it were all, and it is nothing. Oh, how quickly shall all the enjoyments and all the sufferings of this life pass away, and be as if they had not been!

CHAPTER V.

Ver. 1. The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed.

THE church of Christ being one body, is interested in the condition and carriage of each particular Christian, as a part of it, but more especially in respect to those who are more eminent and organic parts of it. Therefore, the apostle, after many excellent directions given to all his Christian brethren to whom he writes, doth most reasonably and fitly add this express exhortation to those who had the oversight and charge of the rest: "The elders which are among you," &c.

The words contain a particular definition of the persons exhorted, and the person exhorting.

I. The persons exhorted: "The elders among you." Elders here, as in other places, is a name, not of age, but of office; yet the office is named by that age which is, or ought to be, most suitably qualified for it, importing, that men, though not aged, yet, if called to that office, should be noted for such wisdom and gravity of mind and carriage, as may give that authority, and command that respect, which is requisite for persons in their calling: not "novices," as St. Paul speaks: not as a light bladder, being easily blown up, as young unstable minds are; but such as young Timothy was in humility and diligence, as the apostle testifies of him, Phil. ii. 20, and as he further exhorts him to be, "Let no man despise thy youth, but be an example of believers

in word, in conversation, in charity, in faith, in purity," 1 Tim. iv. 12.

The name of elders indifferently signifies either their age, or their calling: and the name of "ruling elders" sometimes denotes civil rulers, sometimes pastors of the church; as, amongst the Jews, both offices often met in the same person. Here, it appears that pastors are meant, as the exhortation of "feeding the flock" evidences; which, though it sometimes signifies "ruling," and here may comprise it, yet is chiefly by doctrine. And then the title given to Christ, in the encouragement which is added, confirms this interpretation: "The Chief Shepherd."

A due frame of spirit and carriage in the elders, particularly the apostles of the church, is a thing of prime concern for the good of it. It is one of the heaviest threatenings, when the Lord declares, that he will give a rebellious people such teachers and prophets as they deserved, and indeed desired: "If there be a man to prophesy of wine and strong drink, such a one shall be a prophet," says he to that people, Mic. ii. 11. And, on the other side, amongst the sweetest promises of mercy, this is not the least, to be furnished with plenty of faithful teachers. Though profane men make no reckoning of it, yet, were it in the hardest times, they who know the Lord will account of it as he doth, a sweet allay of all sufferings and hardship: "Though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers," Isa. xxx. 20. Oh! how rich a promise is that, "I will give you pastors according to my own heart," Jer. iii. 15.

This promise is to be pressed and sued for by earnest prayer. Were people much in this duty, pastors would find the benefit of it, and so the people themselves would receive back their prayers, with much gain, into their own bosom: they would have the returned benefit of it, as the vapours that go up from below fall down upon the earth again in sweet showers, and make it fruitful. Thus, went there many prayers up for pastors, their doctrine would "drop as rain, and distil as dew," Deut. xxxii. 2; and the sweet influence of it would make fruitful the valleys, humble hearts receiving it. And, at this time, it is very needful that the Lord be much importuned for the continuance and increase of his favour in this his church. As they who have power should be more careful of those due means which, in schools of learning, or otherwise, are needful for qualifying men for this service; so, all in general, both people and pastors, and such as are offering themselves to that service, should chiefly beg from the higher academy, that teaching, abundance of that Spirit promised to those employed in that work, that might make them "able ministers of the new testament."

Oh! it is an inestimable blessing, to have the saving light of the gospel shining clear in the faithful and powerful ministry of it. They thought so, who said of their worthy teacher, They had rather for them, that the sun should not shine, than that he should not teach. *Satius solem non lucere, quam Chrysostomum non docere.*

2. The person exhorting: "I, a co-presbyter," or "fellow-elder" with you. The duty of mutual exhortation lies on Christians at large, though it be little known amongst the greatest part; but truly,

pastors should be, as in other duties, so particularly in this, eminent and exemplary in their intercourses and converse, saying often one to another, Oh! let us remember to what we are called; to how high and heavy a charge; to what holiness and diligence; how great is the hazard of our miscarriage, and how great the reward of our fidelity! They should be often whetting and sharpening one another by these weighty and holy considerations.

"And a witness of the sufferings of Christ." He did indeed give witness to Christ, by suffering for him the hatred and persecutions of the world in the publishing of the gospel, and so was a witness and martyr before the time that he was put to death: and this I exclude not. But that which is more particularly here intended, is, his certain knowledge of the sufferings of Christ in his own person, as an eye-witness of them, and upon that knowledge, a publisher of them, Luke xxiv. 48. And thus these two suit with the two motives urged, to bear home the exhortation: the one couched in that expression, "the flock of God," ver. 2. His purchase with those his sufferings whereof I was an eye-witness; the other motive, in the words, "a crown of glory," &c., ver. 4. As if he had said, I may speak the more confidently of that, for I am one of those who have a real interest in it, and a firm belief of it, "a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed." And these, indeed, are the things which give weight to a man's words, make them powerful and pressing.

"A witness of the sufferings of Christ." The apostles had a singular advantage in this, who were αὐτοπται, eye-witnesses; and St. Paul, who wanted that, had it supplied by a vision of Christ, in his conversion. A spiritual view of Christ crucified, is

generally, I will not say, absolutely, necessary to make a minister of Christ, but certainly very requisite for the due witnessing of him, and the displaying of the excellency and virtue of his sufferings, and for so preaching the gospel that there shall need no other crucifix;* after so clear and lively a way, as that it may in some measure suit the apostle's word, "Before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth crucified among you," Gal. iii. 1.

Men commonly read, and hear, and may possibly preach of the sufferings of Christ as a common story, and in that way it may a little move a man, and wring tears from his eyes. But faith hath another kind of sight of them, and so works another kind of affections; and without that, the very eye-sight of them had availed the apostles nothing; for how many saw him suffer as they did, who reviled, or at least despised him! But by the eye of faith to see the only begotten Son of God, as "stricken and smitten of God, bearing our sorrows," and "wounded for our transgressions," Jesus Christ, "the righteous," reckoned amongst the unrighteous and malefactors; to see him stripped naked, and scourged, and buffeted, and nailed, and dying; and all for us; this is the thing that will bind upon us most strongly all the duties of Christianity and of our particular callings, and best enable us, according to our callings, to bind them upon others. But our slender view of these things occasions a light sense of them, and that, cold incitements to answerable duty. Certainly, deep impressions would cause lively expressions.

* Alluding to the custom of many popish preachers, to carry a little crucifix into the pulpit with them.—*Dr. Doddridge.*

Would we willingly stir up our own hearts and one another to holy diligence in our station, study more thoroughly Christ as suffering and dying: that is the very life of the gospel, and of our souls; it is all we have to learn, and all we have to teach and press on you. "I determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified," to make Christ's cross the sum of all my learning.

"A partaker of the glory to be revealed." As he was a witness of those sufferings, so a partaker of the glory purchased by those sufferings; and therefore, as one insighted and interested in what he speaks, the apostle might fitly speak of that peculiar duty to which those sufferings and that glory do peculiarly persuade. This is the only way of speaking of those things, not as a discourser or contemplative student, but as "a partaker" of them. There is another force in a pastor's exhortation either to his people or his brethren, who brings his message written upon his own heart; who speaks of the guilt of sin, and the sufferings of Christ for it, as particularly feeling his own guilt, and looking on those sufferings as taking it away; speaks of free grace, as one who either hath drunken of the refreshing streams of it, or at least is earnestly thirsting after it: speaks of the love of Christ, from a heart kindled with it, and of the glory to come, as one who looks to be a sharer in it, and longs earnestly for it, as one who hath all his joy and content laid up in the hopes of it.

And thus with respect to Christians conversing with each other in their mutual exhortings and comfortings, all is cold and dead that flows not from some inward persuasion and experimental knowledge of Divine things. But that gives an edge and a

sweetness to Christian conference—to be speaking of Jesus Christ, not only as a King and as a Redeemer, but as *their* King, and *their* Redeemer, in David's style, "My King, and my God," and of his sufferings as theirs, applied by faith, and acquitting them in St. Paul's style, "Who loved me, and gave himself for me;" to be speaking of the glory to come as their inheritance, that of which they are partakers, their home; as strangers meeting together abroad, in some foreign country, delight to speak of their own land, their parentage, and friends, and the rich patrimony there abiding them. *Peregrinis in terris nulla est jucundior recordatio quam suæ civitatis:* "Nothing is more delightful," says Augustine, "to travellers in distant countries, than the remembrance of their native land." And this ought to be the entertainment of Christians when they meet. Away with trifling, vain discourses; cause all to give place to these refreshing remembrances of our home. Were our hearts much on that rich inheritance above, it would be impossible to refrain our tongues, and to pass on so silent concerning it; to find matter of empty pratings, and be pleased with them, and to have no relish of this. Whither go your hearts? They are out of their way, and abase themselves, that turn so much downwards, and are not more above the sun, eyeing still that blessed land where our purchased inheritance lies.

Oh, seek after more clear knowledge of this glory, and of your interest in it, that your hearts may rejoice in the remembrance of it; that it be not to you as the description of a pleasant land, such as men read of in history, and have no portion in: they like it well, and are pleased with it while they

read, be it but some imagined country or commonwealth finely fancied. But know this country of yours to be real, and no device; and seek to know yourselves to be partakers of it.

This confidence depends not upon a singular revelation, but on the power of faith, and the light of the Spirit of God, which clears to his children the things that he hath freely given them; though some of them at times, some, it may be, all, or most of their time, do want it, God so disposing it, that they scarcely clearly see their right, till they be in possession; see not their heaven and home, till they arrive at it, or are hard upon it. Yet, truly, this we may and ought to seek after in humility and submission, that we may have the "pledge and earnest of our inheritance;" not so much for the comfort within us, though that is allowed, as that it may wean our hearts from things below, may raise us to higher and closer communion with God, and enable us more for his service, and excite us more to his praises, even here. What were a Christian without the hope of this glory? As one said, *Tolle religionem, et nullus eris:* "Take away religion, and you take away the man." And, having this hope, what are all things here to him? How poor and despicable the better and worse of this life, and this life itself! How glad is he that it will quickly end! And what were the length of it to him, but a long continuance of his banishment, a long detainment from his home! and how sweet is the message that is sent for him to come home!

"The glory to be revealed!" It is hidden for the present, wholly unknown to the children of this world, and even but little known to the children of God, who are heirs of it. Yea, those who know

themselves "partakers of it," yet know not much what it is; only this, that it is above all they know or can imagine. They may see things which make a great show here; they may hear of more than they see; they may think or imagine more than either they hear or see, or can distinctly conceive of; but still they must think of this glory as beyond it all. If I see pompous shows, or read or hear of them, yet this I say of them, These are not as my inheritance: Oh! it is far beyond them. Yea, does my mind imagine things far beyond them, golden mountains and marble palaces, yet those fall short of my inheritance, for it is such "as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive." Oh the brightness of that glory when it shall be revealed! How shall they be astonished, who shall see it, and not partake of it! How shall they be filled with everlasting joy, who are heirs of it! Were the heart much upon the thoughts of that glory, what thing is there in this perishing world, which could either lift it up or cast it down?

Ver. 2. Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;
3. Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.
4. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

In these words we have, I. The duty enjoined: "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight of it." II. The due qualifications for this duty: "Not by constraint, not for filthy lucre, not as lording it over God's heritage, but willingly,

of a ready mind," and as "being ensamples to the flock." III. The high advantage to be expected: "An unfading crown of glory, when the chief Shepherd shall appear."

I. The duty enjoined. Every step of the way of our salvation hath on it the print of infinite majesty, wisdom, and goodness, and this amongst the rest; that men, sinful, weak men, are made subservient in that great work of bringing Christ and souls to meet; that by the "foolishness of preaching," or what appears so to carnal wisdom, the chosen of God are called, and come unto Jesus, and are made "wise unto salvation;" and that the life which is conveyed to them by the "word of life" in the hands of poor men, is by the same means preserved and advanced. This is the standing work of the ministry, and this the thing here bound upon them that are employed in it, "to feed the flock of God that is among them." Jesus Christ descended to purchase a church, and ascended to provide and furnish it, to send down his Spirit: "He ascended and gave gifts," particularly "for the work of the ministry;" and the great use of them is this, "Feed the flock of God."

Not to say any more of this usual resemblance of a flock, as importing the weakness and tenderness of the church, the continual need she stands in of inspection, and guidance, and defence, and the tender care of the chief Shepherd for these things; the phrase enforces the present duty of subordinate pastors, their care and diligence in feeding that flock. The due rule of discipline not excluded, the main part of this duty is by doctrine, the leading them into the wholesome and "green pastures" of saving truths revealed in the gospel, accommodating the

way of teaching to their condition and capacity; and with this they should be, as much as possible, particularly acquainted, and suit diligently and prudently their doctrine to it. They are to "feed the sheep," those more advanced; to "feed the lambs," the younger and weaker; to have special care of the infirm; to learn of their Master, the great Shepherd, to "bind up that which is broken, and strengthen that which is sick," Ezek. xxxiv. 16,—those that are broken in spirit, that are exercised with temptations; and "gently to lead those that are with young," Isa. xl. 11,—those in whom the inward work of grace is as in the conception, and they heavy and weak with the weight of it, and the many difficulties and doubtings which are frequent companions and symptoms of that work. Oh, what dexterity and skilfulness, what diligence, and, above all, what affection and bowels of compassion, are needful for this task! "Who is sufficient for these things?" 2 Cor. ii. 16. Who would not faint and give over in it, were not our Lord "the chief Shepherd;" were not all our sufficiency laid up in his rich fulness, and all our insufficiency covered in his gracious acceptance?

Inference 1. This is the thing we have to eye and study, to set him before us, and to apply ourselves in his strength to this work:—not to seek to please, but to feed; not to delight the ears, but to feed the souls of his people; to see that the food be according to his appointment; not empty or subtle notions, not light affected expressions, but wholesome truths, solid food, spiritual things spiritually conceived, and uttered with holy understanding and affection.

And we are to consider this, wherein lies a very pressing motive; it is "the flock of God:" not our own, to use as we please, but committed to our

custody by him, who loves highly and prizes his flock, and will require an account of us concerning it; his bought, his purchased flock, and at so dear a rate, as the apostle St. Paul uses this same consideration, in the same argument, "The flock of God that he hath bought with his own blood," Acts xx. 28. How reasonable is it that we bestow our strength and life on that flock for which our Lord laid down his life! that we be most ready to draw out our spirits for them for whom he let out his blood! "Had I," says that holy man, Bernard, "some of that blood poured forth on the cross, how carefully would I carry it! And ought I not to be as careful of those souls that it was shed for?"* Oh, that price which was paid for souls, which he, who was no foolish merchant, but wisdom itself, gave for them! Were that price more in our eyes, and more in yours, nothing would so much take either you or us, as the matter of our souls. In this would our desires and endeavours meet, we to use, and you to improve, the means of saving your precious souls.

Inference 2. This mainly concerns us indeed, who have charge of many, especially finding the right cure of one soul within us so hard: but you are concerned in it, each for one. At least remember, this is the end of the ministry, that you may be brought unto Christ; that you may be led to the sweet pastures and pleasant streams of the gospel: that you may be spiritually fed, and may grow in that heavenly life, which is here begun in all those in whom it shall hereafter be perfected.

And as we ought in preaching, so ought you in hearing, to propound this end to yourselves, that you may be spiritually refreshed, and walk in the

* Advent. Serm. 3.

strength of that Divine nourishment. Is this your purpose when you come hither? Inquire of your own hearts, and see what you seek, and what you find in the public ordinances of God's house. Certainly, the most do not so much as think on the due design of them; they aim at no end, and therefore can attain none; they seek nothing, but sit out their hour, asleep or awake, as it may happen. Or, possibly, some seek to be delighted for the time, as the Lord tells the prophet, to hear, "as it were, a pleasant song," Ezek. xxxiii. 32, if the gifts and strain of the speaker be any thing pleasing. Or, it may be, they seek to gain some new notions, to add somewhat to their stock of knowledge, either that they may be enabled for discourse, or, simply, that they may know. Some, it may be, go a little further; they like to be stirred and moved for the time, and to have some touch of good affection kindled in them: but this lasts but "for a while," till their other thoughts and affairs get in, and smother and quench it; they are not careful to blow it up, and improve it. How many, when they have been a little affected with the word, go out and fall into other discourses and thoughts! they either take in their affairs secretly, as it were under their cloak, and their hearts keep up a conference with them, or, if they forbear this, yet, as soon as they go out, they plunge themselves over head and ears in the world, and lose all which might have any way advantaged their spiritual condition. It may be, one will say, It was a good sermon. Is that to the purpose? But what think you it hath for your praise or dispraise? Instead of saying, Oh, how well was that spoken! you should say, Oh, how hard is repentance! how sweet a thing is faith! how excellent

the love of Jesus Christ! That were your best and most real commendation of the sermon, with true benefit to yourselves.

If some of you be careful of repeating, yet rest not on that: if you be able to speak of it afterwards upon occasion, there is somewhat requisite beside and beyond this, to evidence that you are indeed fed by the word, as the flock of God. As when sheep, you know, or other creatures, are nourished by their pasture, the food they have eaten appears not in the same fashion upon them, not in grass, but in growth of flesh and fleece; thus the word would truly appear to feed you, not by the bare discoursing of the word over again, but by the temper of your spirits and actions, if in them you really grow more spiritual, if humility, self-denial, charity, and holiness are increased in you by it; otherwise, whatsoever literal knowledge you attain, it avails you nothing. Though you heard many sermons every day, and attained further light by them, and carried a plausible profession of religion, yet, unless by the gospel you be transformed into the likeness of Christ, and grace be indeed growing in you, you are but, as one says of the cypress-tree, fair and tall, but fruitless.*

Are you not grieved and afraid, or may not many of you be so, who have lived many years under a fruitful ministry, and yet are as earthly and selfish, as unacquainted with God and his ways, as at the first? Consider this, that as the neglect of souls will lie heavy on unholy or negligent ministers, so, a great many souls are ruining themselves under some measure of fit means, and the slighting of those means will make their condition far heavier

* Καλοὶ καὶ ὕψηλοι καὶ κάρπον οὐκ ἔχουσι.

than that of many others. Remember our Saviour's word, "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you," Matt. xi. 21.

II. The discharge of this high task we have here duly qualified: the apostle expresses the upright way of it, both negatively and positively.

There are three evils the apostle would remove from this work; constrainedness, covetousness, and ambition, as opposed to willingness, a ready mind, and an exemplary temper and behaviour.

1. We are cautioned against constrainedness, μὴ ἀναγκαστῶς; against being driven to the work by necessity, indigence, and want of other means of subsistence, as it is with too many; making a trade of it to live by, and setting to it as to any other calling for that end; yea, making it the refuge and forlorn resource of their insufficiency for other callings. And as men are not to undertake the work, driven to it by that hard weapon of necessity, so, being engaged in it, they are not to discharge the duties of it merely upon necessity, because of fines binding to it, or for fear of censure: this is a violent, forced motion, and cannot but be both very unpleasant and unprofitable, as to the proper end and profiting of this work. And as the principle of the motion in this service should not be a compelling necessity of any kind, but true willingness of heart, so this willingness should not arise from any thing but pure affection to the work.

2. Not for "filthy" gain, but purely from the inward bent of the mind. As it should not be a compulsive or violent motion by necessity from without, so it should not be an artificial motion by

weights hung on within—avarice and love of gain. The former were a wheel, driven or drawn, going by force; the latter, little better, as a clock made to go by art, by weights hung to it. But there should be a natural motion, like that of the heavens in their course. A willing obedience to the Spirit of God within, moving a man in every part of this holy work, that is προθυμὼς, his mind carried to it as the thing he delights in, and in which he loves to be exercised. So Timothy "careth" γνησίως, not artificially, but naturally, Phil. ii. 20. There may be in a faithful pastor very great reluctance in engaging and adhering to the work, upon a sense of the excellence of it and his own unfitness, and the deep apprehension of those high interests, the glory of God and the salvation of souls; and yet he may enter into it, and continue in it, with this readiness of mind too; that is, with most single and earnest desires of doing all he can for God, and "the flock of God;" only grieved that there is in him so little suitableness of heart, so little holiness and acquaintance with God for enabling him to it. But might he find that, he were satisfied; and, in expectation of that, he goes on, and waits, and is doing according to his little skill and strength, and cannot leave it. He is "constrained" indeed, but all the constraint is that of "love to Jesus," and, for his sake, to the souls he hath bought, 2 Cor. v. 14; and all the gain sought is, to gain souls to Christ, which is far different from the constraint and the gain here prohibited; yea, this is indeed that very willingness and readiness of mind which is opposed to that other constraint. That is without; this is within; that other gain is base filthy gain, αἰσχροκέρδος; this noble and divine.

Inference 1. Far be it from us that necessity and constraint should be the thing that moves us in so holy a work. The Lord whom we serve sees into the heart, and if he find not that primarily moving, accounts all our diligence nothing. And let not base earth within be the cause of our willingness, but a mind touched with heaven. It is true, the temptations of earth with us, in the matter of gain, are not great; but yet the heart may cleave to them as much as if they were much greater, and if it do cleave to them, they shall ruin us; as well a poor stipend and glebe, if the affection be upon them, as a great deanery or bishopric. If a man fall into it, he may drown in a small brook, being under water, as well as in the great ocean. Oh, the little time that remains! Let us join our desires and endeavours in this work, bend our united strength to serve Him, that we may have joy in that day of reckoning.

And, indeed, there is nothing moves us aright, nor shall we ever find comfort in this service, unless it be from a cheerful inward readiness of mind, and that from the love of Christ. Thus said he to his apostle, Lovest thou me? Then feed my sheep, and feed my lambs, John xxi. 15, 16. Love to Christ begets love to his people's souls, which are so precious to him, and a care of feeding them. He devolves the working of love towards him upon his flock, for their good, puts them in his room to receive the benefit of our services, which cannot reach him considered in himself; he can receive no other profit from it. Love, much love, gives much unwearied care and much skill in this charge. How sweet is it to him that loves, to bestow himself, "to spend and be spent," upon his service whom he loves! Jacob, in the same kind of service, endured all that was im-

posed on him, and found it light by reason of love, the cold of the nights and heat of the days: seven years he served for his Rachel, "and they seemed to him but a few days, for the love he had to her," Gen. xxix. 20.

Love is the great endowment of a shepherd of Christ's flock. He says not to Peter, Art thou wise, or learned, or eloquent? but, "Lovest thou me? Then feed my sheep."

3. The third evil is ambition, and that is either in the affecting of undue authority, or the overstrained and tyrannical exercise of due authority, or to seek those dignities that suit not with this charge, which is not *dominiam*, but *ministerium*. This temper, therefore, is forbidden, Luke xxii. 25, 26, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, but ye shall not be so." There is a ministerial authority to be used in discipline, and more sharpness with some than with others; but still, lowliness and moderation must be predominant, and not domineering with rigour; rather being examples to the flock in all holiness, and especially in humility and meekness, wherein our Lord Jesus particularly propounds his own example: "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart."

"But being ensamples." Such a pattern as they may stamp and print their spirits and carriage by, and be "followers of you, as you are of Christ." And without this, there is little or no fruitful teaching. Well says Nazianzen, "Either teach not, or teach by living." So the apostle exhorteth Timothy to be an "example in word," but withal "in conversation," 1 Tim. iv. 12. That is τύπος, the best printed copy.

But this pares off will some think, all encourage-

ments of learning; leaves no advantage, no respect, or authority. Oh, no; it removes poor worthless encouragements out of the way, to make place for one great one that is sufficient, which all the others together are not.

III. The high advantage: "And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory which fadeth not away." Thou shalt lose nothing by all that restraint from base gain, and vain glory, and worldly power. No matter, let them all go for *a crown:* that weighs them all down; that shall abide for ever. Oh, how far more excellent! "A crown of glory," pure, unmixed glory, without any ingredient of pride or sinful vanity, or any danger of it. And a crown "that fadeth not," ἀμαράντινον, of such a flower as withers not: not a temporary garland of fading flowers, such as all here are. "Woe to the crown of pride!" says the prophet, Isa. xxviii. 1. Though it be made of flowers growing in a fat valley, yet their glorious beauty is a fading flower; but this will remain fresh and in perfect lustre to all eternity. May they not well trample on base gain and vain applause, who have this crown to look to? They that will be content with those, let them be; but "they have their reward," and it is done and gone, when faithful followers are to receive theirs. Joys of royal pomp, marriages and feasts, how soon do they vanish as a dream! That of Ahasuerus lasted about half a year, but then it ended! And how many since that are gone and forgotten! But this day begins a triumph and a feast that shall never either end or weary, affording still fresh, ever new delights. All things here, the choicest pleasures, cloy, but satisfy not: those above shall always satisfy, and never

cloy, "When the chief Shepherd shall appear." And that shall shortly be: this moment will shortly be out.

What is to be refused in the way to this crown? All labour is sweet for it. And what is there here to be desired to detain our hearts, that we should not most willingly let go, to rest from our labours, and receive our crown? Was ever any king sad to think that the day of his coronation drew nigh? And then there will be no envy nor jealousies: all will be kings, each with his crown, each rejoicing in the glory of the others, and all in HIS, who that day shall be all in all.

Ver. 5. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

Sin hath disordered all; so that nothing is to be found but distemper and crookedness in the condition and ways of men towards God, and towards one another, till a new Spirit come in, and rectify all. And very much of that redress lies in this particular grace of humility here recommended by the apostle.

That grace regulates the carriage—1. Of the "younger" towards the "elder." 2. Of all men "one to another." 3. Of all towards God.

1. The younger are to be subject to the elder. Which I take so to refer to difference of years, that it hath some aspect likewise to the relation of those that are under the discipline and government of the elders, πρεσβύτεροι, who, though not always such in years, ought, however, to suit that name in exemplary gravity and wisdom. It is no seigniory,

but a ministry; yet there is a sacred authority in it, when rightly carried, which both duly challenges, and effectually commands, that respect and obedience which is fit for the right order and government of the house of God.

The Spirit of Christ in his ministers, is the thing that makes them truly "elders," and truly "worthy of double honour;" and without that, men may hunt after respect and credit by other parts, and the more they follow it, the faster it flies from them; or, if they catch any thing of it, they only grasp a shadow.

Inference. Learn, you my brethren, that obedience which is due to the discipline of God's house. This is all we plead for in this point. And know, if you refuse it, and despise the ordinance of God, he will resent the indignity as done to himself. And oh, that all who have that charge of his house upon them, would mind his interest wholly, and not rise in conceit of their power, but wholly employ and improve it for their Lord and Master, and look on no respect paid to themselves, as for its own sake desirable, but only so far as is needful for the profitable discharge and advancement of his work in their hands! What are human differences and regards? How empty a vapour! And whatsoever it is, nothing is lost by single and entire love of our Lord's glory, and total aiming at that. "Them that honour him, he will honour; and those that despise him, shall be despised," 1 Sam. ii. 30.

But though this [likewise] implies, I conceive, somewhat relative to the former subject, yet certainly, its full scope is more extensive, and directs us, touching the difference of years, to yield the *subjection;* that is, the respect and reverence which is due from younger to elder persons.

The presumption and unbridledness of youth require the pressing and binding on of this rule. And it is of undeniable equity, even written in nature, as due to aged persons. But, doubtless, those reap this due fruit in that season the most, who have ripened it most by the influence of their grave and holy carriage. "The hoary head" is indeed "a crown,"—but when?—"when found in the way of righteousness," Prov. xvi. 31. There it shines, and hath a kind of royalty over youth; otherwise, a graceless old age is a most despicable and lamentable sight. What gains an unholy old man or woman by their scores of years, but the more scores of guiltiness and misery? And their white hairs speak nothing but ripeness for wrath. Oh! to be as "a tree planted in the house of the Lord, bringing forth fruit in old age," Psa. xcii. 12, 13. Much experience in the ways of God, and much disdain of the world, and much desire of the love of God, a heavenly temper of mind, and frame of life; this is the advantage of many years. But to have seen and felt the more misery, and "heaped up" the more sin, the greater bundle of it, "against the day of wrath," a woeful "treasure" of it, threescore or threescore and ten years a gathering, and with so much increase every day; no vacation, no dead years, no, not a day wherein it was not growing; how deplorable a case!

A sad reflection, to look back and think, What have I done for God? and to find nothing but such a world of sin committed against him! How much better he who gets home betimes in his youth, if once delivered from sin and death, at one with God, and some way serviceable to him, or desiring to be

so, and who hath a quick voyage, having lived much in a little time!

2. "All of you be subject one to another." This yet further dilates the duty, makes it universally mutual; one subject to another. This directly turns about the vain contest of men, that arises from the natural mischief of self-love. Every one would carry it, and be best and highest. The very company of Christ, and his exemplary lowliness, and the meanness of himself and those his followers, all these did not bar out this frothy, foolish question, "Who shall be greatest?" And so far it was disputed, that it occasioned heat about it, "a strife amongst them," Luke xxii. 24. Now, this rule is just opposite: each is to strive to be lowest, "subject one to another."

This doth not annul either civil or church government, nor those differences that are grounded upon the law of nature, or of civil society; for we see immediately before that such differences are allowed, and the particular duties of them recommended; but it only requires that all due respect, according to their station, be given by each Christian to another. And though there cannot be such a subjection of masters or parents to their servants and children, as is due to them from these, yet a lowly, meek carrying of their authority, a tender respect of their youth, the receiving of an admonition from them duly qualified, is that which suits with the rule; and, in general, not delighting in the trampling on, or abusing of any, but rather seeking the credit and good esteem of all as our own; taking notice of that good in them, wherein they are beyond us: (for all have some advantage, and none hath

all;) and, in a word, (and it is the precept of St. Paul, like this of our apostle here,) "In honour preferring one another," Rom. xii. 10, which denotes, Let this be all the strife, who shall put most respect each on another, according to the capacity and station of every one: "in giving honour, go each one before another."

Now that such carriage may be sincere, no empty compliment, or court holy water, (as they speak,) but a part of the solid holiness of a Christian, the apostle requires the true principle of such deportment, the grace of "humility," that a Christian "put on that;" not the appearance of it, to act in as a stage-garment, but the truth of it, as their constant habit. "Be ye clothed with humility." It must appear in your outward carriage; so the resemblance of clothing imports. But let it appear as really it is; so the very name of it imports. It is not ταπεινοφανία, but ταπεινοφροσύνη; not a "show of humility," but heart-lowliness, "humility of mind."

As it is the bent of humility to hide other graces, so far as piety to God and our brethren would permit, so it would willingly hide itself; it loves not to appear but as necessity urges. Appear it must, and it doth somewhat more appear than many other graces do, though it seeks not to appear. It is seen as a modest man or woman's apparel, which they wear not for the end that it may be seen; they do not gaudily flaunt and delight in dressing: though there is a decency as well as necessity, which they do and may have respect to, yet it is in so neat and unaffected a way, that they are a good example even in that point. Thus, humility in carriage and words is as the decorum of this clothing, but the main is the real usefulness of it.

And therefore, a truly humble man desires not much to appear humble. Yea, were it not for disedifying his brethren, he would rather disguise and hide, not only other things by humility, but even humility itself, and would be content, upon the mistake of some words or gestures, to pass for proud and vain, being humble within, rather than to be big in his own eyes, under a semblance of outward lowliness. Yea, were it not that charity and piety do both forbid it, he would not care to do some things on purpose that might seem arrogant, to carry humility unseen, that doth so naturally delight in covering all graces, and is sorry that it cannot do so without being seen itself, as that garment which covers the rest, must of necessity be seen itself. But seeing it must be so, it is with the least show that may be, as a dark veil cast about rich attire, hides their show, and makes very little itself.

This, therefore, is mainly to be studied, that the seat of humility be *the heart*. Although it will be seen in the carriage, yet as little as it can; as few words as may be concerning itself; and those it doth speak, must be the real thoughts of the mind, and not an affected voice of it differing from the inward sense: otherwise, humble speech and carriage only put on without, and not fastened in the inside, is the most refined and subtle, and indeed the most dangerous kind of pride. And this I would recommend as a safe way: ever let thy thoughts concerning thyself be below what thou utterest: and what thou seest needful or fitting to say to thine own abasement, be not only content, which most are not, to be taken at thy word, and believed to be such by them that hear thee, but be desirous of it, and let that be the end of thy speech, to persuade them

and gain it of them, that they really take thee for as worthless and mean as thou dost express thyself.

Inference. But how little are we acquainted with the real frame of Christianity! the most living without a rule, not laying it to their words and ways at all, nor yielding so much as a seeming obedience to the gospel; while others take up a kind of profession, and think all consists in some religious performances, and do not study the inward reserve of their heart-evils, nor labour to have that temple purged: for the heart should be a temple, and it stands in much need of a sweeping out of the filthiness, and putting out of idols. Some there be, who are much busied about the matter of their assurance, still upon that point, which it is lawful, indeed, and laudable to inquire after, yet not so as to neglect other things more needful. It were certainly better for many, when they find no issue that way, to turn somewhat of their diligence to the study of Christian graces and duties in their station, and to task themselves for a time, were it to the more special seeking, first, of some one grace, and then, of another, as meekness, and patience, and this particularly of humility. To be truly heart-humble—many men despise it in others; but some that will commend it in the general, or in some of those in whom they behold it, yet seek not to put it on themselves. They love to be more gay, and to seem to be somebody, and not to abase themselves. It is the way, say they, to be undone. This clothing is too poor a stuff, and of too sad a colour for them. Oh, my brethren, you know not the excellency of it. Ye look out at a distance and judge according to your light, vain minds. But will you see it by the light of the word, and then you shall perceive much hidden richness and comeliness

in it. And do not only approve it, and call it comely on others, but put it on, and so it is most comely. And as it is with respect to all graces, so particularly, as to this clothing of humility, though it make least show, yet, come near, and you will see it both rich and comely; and though it hides other graces, yet, when they do appear under it, as sometimes they will, a little glance of them so, makes them much more esteemed. Rebekah's beauty and her jewels were covered with a veil, but when they did appear, the veil set them off, and commended them, though at a distance it hid them.

Again: as in all graces, so particularly in this grace, take heed of a disguise or counterfeit of it. Oh for sincerity in all things, and particularly in this! To be low in thine own eyes, and willing to be so in the eyes of others, this is the very upright nature of heart humility. 1. Not to be deluded with a false conceit of advantages thou hast not. 2. Not to be swelled with a vain conceit of those thou really hast. 3. Not affecting to be esteemed by others, either upon their imagining thee to have some good that is not in thee, or discerning that which is. Is not the day at hand, when men will be taken off the false heights they stand on, and set on their own feet; when all the esteem of others shall vanish and pass away like smoke, and thou shalt be just what God finds and accounts thee, and neither more nor less? Oh! the remembrance of that day when a true estimate will be made of all, this would make men hang less upon the unstable conceits and opinions of one another, knowing our judgment and day shall shortly end. Be it little or much that thou hast, the lower and closer thou carriest it under this cloak, the safer shall it and thou

be, the more shall it increase, and thou shalt be the more like him in whom "all fulness dwells." In this he hath most expressly set himself before us as our pattern; and one says well, "Surely man might now be constrained to be proud, for whom God himself became humble."

Now, to work the heart to an humble posture, 1. Look into thyself in earnest: and, truly, whosoever thou be that hast the highest conceit of thyself, and the highest causes for it, a real sight of thyself will lay thy crest. Men look on any good, or any fancy of it, in themselves, with both eyes, and skip over as unpleasant their real defects and deformities. Every man is naturally his own flatterer; otherwise, flatteries, and false cryings up from others, would make little impression; but hence their success, they meet with the same conceit within. But let any man see his ignorance, and lay what he knows not over against what he knows; the disorders in his heart and affections, over against any right motion in them; his secret follies and sins, against his outwardly blameless carriage,—this man shall not readily love and embrace himself; yea, it shall be impossible for him not to abase and abhor himself.

2. Look on the good in others, and the evil in thyself; make that the parallel, and then thou wilt walk humbly. Most men do just the contrary, and that foolish and unjust comparison puffs them up.

3. Thou art not required to be ignorant of that good which really is so indeed; but beware of imagining that to be good which is not; yea, rather let something that is truly good pass thy view, and see it within, rather than beyond its true size. And then, whatsoever it is, see it not as thine own, but as

God's, his free gift; and so, the more thou hast looking on it in that view, thou wilt certainly be the more humble, as having the more obligations: the weight of them will press thee down, and lay thee still lower, as you see it in Abraham,—the clear visions and promises he had, made him fall down flat to the ground. Gen. xv. 12.

4. Pray much for the spirit of humility, the Spirit of Christ, for that is it: otherwise, all thy vileness will not humble thee. When men hear of this or of other graces, and how reasonable they are, they think presently to have them, and do not consider the natural enmity and rebellion of their own hearts, and the necessity of receiving them from heaven. And therefore, in the use of all other means, be most dependent on that influence, and most in the use of that means which opens the heart most to that influence, and draws it down upon the heart, and that is, prayer.

Of all the evils of our corrupt nature, there is none more connatural and universal than pride, the grand wickedness, self-exalting in our own and others' opinion. Though I will not contest what was the first step in that complicated first sin, yet certainly this of pride was one, and a main ingredient in it,—that which the unbelief conceived going before, and the disobedience following after, were both servants to; and ever since, it sticks still deep in our nature. St. Augustine says truly, "That which first overcame man, is the last thing he overcomes." Some sins, comparatively, may die before us, but this hath life in it, sensibly as long as we. It is as the heart of all, the first living, and the last dying; and it hath this advantage, that, whereas other sins are fomented by one another, this feeds even on virtues

and graces as a moth that breeds in them, and consumes them, even in the finest of them, if it be not carefully looked to. This hydra, as one head of it is cut off, another rises up. It will secretly cleave to the best actions, and prey upon them. And therefore is there so much need that we continually watch, and fight, and pray against it, and be restless in the pursuit of real and deep humiliation, daily seeking to advance further in it; to be nothing, and to desire to be nothing; not only to bear, but to love our own abasement, and the things that procure and help it, to take pleasure in them, so far as may be without sin: yea, even in respect of our sinful failings, when they are discovered, to love the bringing low of ourselves by them, while we hate, and grieve for the sin of them.

And, above all, it is requisite to watch ourselves in our best things, that self get not in, or, if it break in, or steal in at any time, that it be presently found out and cast out again; to have that established within us, to do all for God, to intend him and his glory in all, and to be willing to advance his glory, were it by our own disgrace; not to make raising or pleasing thyself the rule of exercising thy parts and graces, when thou art called to use and bring them forth, but the good of thy brethren, and in that, the glory of thy Lord. Now, this is indeed to be severed from self and united to him, to have self-love turned into the love of God. And this is his own work: it is above all other hands: therefore, the main combat against pride, and the conquest of it, and the gaining of humility, is certainly by prayer. God bestows himself most upon those who are most abundant in prayer; and those to whom he shows himself most are certainly the most humble.

Now, to stir us up to diligence in the exercise of this grace, take briefly a consideration or two.

1. Look on that above pointed at — the high example of lowliness set before us: Jesus Christ requiring our particular care to take this lesson from him. And is it not most reasonable? He the most fair, the most excellent and complete of all men, and yet the most humble! He more than a man, who yet willingly became, in some sort, less than a man, as it is expressed, Psa. xxii. 6, "a worm and no man." And when Majesty itself "emptied itself," and descended so low, shall a worm swell and be high-conceited?

Then consider, it was for us he humbled himself, to expiate our pride; and therefore it is evidently the more just that we follow a pattern which is both so great in itself, and doth so nearly concern us. O humility, the virtue of Christ, (that which he so peculiarly espoused,) how dost thou confound the vanity of our pride!

2. Consider the safety of grace under this clothing; it is that which keeps it unexposed to a thousand hazards. Humility doth grace no prejudice in covering it, but indeed shelters it from violence and wrong: therefore they do justly call it *conservatrix virtutum*, "the preserver of graces;" and one says well, "That he who carries other graces without humility, carries a precious powder in the wind without a cover."

3. Consider the increase of grace by it, as here expressed; the perfect enmity of God against pride, and his bounty towards humility. "He resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."

"God resisteth the proud, [ἀντιτάσσεται,] singles it out for his grand enemy, and sets himself in battle

array against it: so the word is. It breaks the ranks of men in which he hath set them, when they are not subject, ὑποτασσόμενοι, as the word is before; yea, pride not only breaks rank, but rises up in rebellion against God, and doth what it can to dethrone him, and usurp his place: therefore he orders his forces against it. And to be sure, if God be able to make his party good, pride shall not escape ruin. He will break it, and bring it low; for he is set upon that purpose, and will not be diverted.

"But he giveth grace," pours it out plentifully upon humble hearts. His sweet dews and showers of grace, slide off the mountains of pride, and fall on the low valleys of humble hearts, and make them pleasant and fertile. The swelling heart, puffed up with a fancy of fulness, hath no room for grace. It is lifted up, is not hallowed and fitted to receive and contain the graces that descend from above. And again, as the humble heart is most capacious, and, as being emptied and hollowed, can hold most, so it is the most thankful, acknowledges all as received, while the proud cries out that all is his own. The return of glory that is due from grace, comes most freely and plentifully from an humble heart: God delights to enrich it with grace, and it delights to return him glory. The more he bestows on it, the more it desires to honour him with all; and the more it doth so, the more readily he bestows still more upon it; and this is the sweet intercourse betwixt God and the humble soul. This is the noble ambition of humility, in respect whereof all the aspirings of pride are low and base. When all is reckoned, the lowliest mind is truly the highest; and these two agree so well, that the more

lowly it is, it is thus the higher; and the higher thus, it is still the more lowly.

O my brethren, want of this is a great cause of all our wants. Why should our God bestow on us what we would bestow on our idol, self? Or, if not to idolize thyself, yet to idolize the thing, the gift that grace bestowed, to fetch thy believing and comforts from that, which is to put it in his place who gave, and "to make Baal of it," as some would render Hosea ii. 8.* Now he will not furnish thee thus to his own prejudice therein. Seek, therefore, to have thy heart on a high design seeking grace still, not to rest in any gift, nor to grow vain and regardless of him upon it. If we had but this fixed with us—What gift or grace I seek, what comfort I seek, it shall be no sooner mine, but it shall be all thine again, and myself with it; I desire nothing from thee, but that it may come back to thee, and draw me with it unto thee; this is all my end, and all my desire:—the request thus presented would not come back so often unanswered.

This is the only way to grow quickly rich: come still poor to him who hath enough ever to enrich thee, and desire of his riches, not for thyself, but for him. Mind entirely his glory in all thou hast and seekest to have. What thou hast, use so, and what thou wantest, vow that thou wilt use it so; let it be his in thy purpose, even before it be thine in possession, as Hannah did in her suit for a son, 1 Sam. i. 11; and thou shalt obtain as she did. And then, as she was, be thou faithful in the

* The words "Gnasu Lebagnol," which we render "which they prepared for Baal," may, as the margin notes, be translated "wherewith they made Baal."—*Dr. Doddridge.*

performance: "Him whom I received," says she, "by petition, I have returned to the Lord."

It is undoubtedly the secret pride and selfishness of our hearts that obstruct much of the bounty of God's hand in the measure of our graces, and the sweet embraces of his love, which we should otherwise find. The more that we let go of ourselves, still the more should we receive of himself. Oh, foolish we, who refuse so blessed an exchange!

To this humility, as in these words it is taken in the notion of our inward thoughts touching ourselves, and our carriage in relation to others, the apostle joins the other, humility, in relation to God; being indeed the different actings of one and the same grace, and inseparably connected each with the other.

Ver. 6. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.

This is pressed by a reason both of equity and necessity, in that expression, "the mighty hand of God." He is sovereign Lord of all, and all things do obeisance to him; therefore, it is just, that you his people, professing loyalty and obedience to him, be most submissive and humble in your subjection to him in all things. Again, mark the necessity, "his mighty hand:" there is no striving; it is a vain thing to flinch and struggle, for he doth what he will. And his hand is so mighty, that the greatest power of the creature is nothing to it. Yea, it is all indeed derived from him, and therefore cannot do any whit against him. If thou wilt not yield, thou must yield: if thou wilt not be led, thou shalt be pulled and drawn. Therefore, submission is your only course.

A third reason by which this duty is pressed, is that of utility, or the certain advantage of it. As there is nothing to be gained, yea, rather, as you are certainly ruined by reluctance, so this humble submission is the only way to gain your point. What would you have under any affliction, but be delivered, and raised up? Thus alone can you attain that: "Humble yourselves, and he shall raise you up in due time."

This is the end why he humbles you: he lays weights upon you, that you may be depressed. Now, when this end is gained, that you are willingly so, then the weights are taken off, and you are lifted up by his gracious hand. Otherwise, it is not enough, that he hath humbled you by his hand, unless you "humble yourselves" under his hand. Many have had great and many pressures, one affliction after another, and been humbled, and yet not made humble, as they commonly express the difference: humbled by force in regard of their outward condition, but not humbled in their inward temper; and therefore, as soon as the weight is off, like heaps of wool, they rise up again, and grow as big as they were.

If we would consider this in our particular trials, and aim at this deportment, it were our wisdom. Are they not mad, who, under any stroke, quarrel or struggle against God? What gain your children thus at your hands, but more blows? Nor is this only an unseemly and unhappy way, openly to resist and strive, but even secretly to fret and grumble; for he hears the least whispering of the heart, and looks most how that behaves itself under his hand. Oh, humble acceptance of his chastisement is our duty and our peace; that which gains

most on the heart of our Father, and makes the rod fall soonest out of his hand.

And not only should we learn this in our outward things, but in our spiritual condition, as the thing the Lord is much pleased with in his children. There is a stubbornness and fretting of heart concerning our souls, that arises from pride and the untamedness of our nature; and yet some take a pleasure in it, touching the matter of comfort and assurance, if it be withheld. Or, (which they take more liberty in,) if it be sanctification and victory over sin they seek, and yet find little or no success, but the Lord holding them under in these, they then vex themselves, and wax more discontented, and nothing pleases them: as peevish children, upon the refusal of somewhat they would have, take displeasure, and make no account of the daily provision made for them, and all the other benefits they have by the care and love of their parents. This is a folly very unbeseeming the children that are the "children of wisdom," and should walk as such; and till they learn more humble respect for their Father's will, they are still the further off from their purpose. Were they once brought to submit the matter, and give him heartily his will, he would readily give them theirs, as far as it were for their good: as you say to your children, of any thing they are too stiff and earnest in, and make a noise for, "Cry not for it, and you shall have it."

And this is the thing we observe not, that the Lord often, by his delays, is aiming at this; and were this done, we cannot think how graciously he would deal with us. His gracious design is, to make much room for grace by much humbling: especially in some spirits which need much trying, or when he

means much to enable for some singular service. And thus, the time is not lost, as we are apt to imagine, but it furthers our end, while we think the contrary. It is necessary time and pains that are given to the unballasting of a ship, the casting out of the earth and sand, when it is to be laden with spices. We must be emptied more, if we would have more of that fulness and riches which we are longing for.

So long as we fume and chafe against his way, though it be in our best supplications, we are not in a posture for a favourable answer. Would we wring things out of his hand by fretfulness? That is not the way: no; but present humble, submissive suits: Lord, this is my desire, but thou art wise and gracious; I refer the matter to thy will for the thing, and for the measure, and for the time, and all. Were we moulded to this composure, then were mercy near. When he hath gained this, broken our will, and tamed our stoutness, then he relents and pities. See Jer. xxx. 17, 18, "Because they called thee an outcast, &c., thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will bring again the captivity of Jacob's tents," &c.

This I would recommend in any estate, the humble folding under the Lord's hand, kissing the rod, and falling low before him; and this is the way to be raised. But there may be some one who thinks he hath tried this awhile, and is still at the same point, hath gained nothing, and he may therefore be ready to fall back to his old repinings; let such a one know that his humbling and compliance were not upright; it was a fit of false, constrained submission, and therefore lasts not; it was but a tempting of God, instead of submitting to him.

"Oh, will he have a submission? I will try it, but with this reserve, that if after such a time I gain not what I seek, I shall think it is lost, and that I have reason to return to my discontent." Though the man says not thus, yet this meaning is secretly under it. But wouldst thou have it right, it must be without condition, without reserve; no time, nor any thing prescribed: and then he will make his word good, "he will raise thee up," and that

"In due time." Not thy fancied time, but his own wisely appointed time. Thou thinkest, Now I am sinking; if he help not now, it will be too late. Yet he sees it otherwise: he can let thee sink still lower, and yet bring thee up again. He doth but stay till the most fit time. Thou canst not see it now, but thou shalt see it, that his chosen time is absolutely best. "God waiteth to be gracious," Isa. xxx. 18. Doth he wait, and wilt not thou? Oh, the firm belief of his wisdom, power, and goodness, what difficulty will it not surmount? So then, be humble under his hand. Submit not only thy goods, thy health, thy life, but thy soul. Seek and wait for thy pardon as a condemned rebel, with thy rope about thy neck. Lay thyself low before him, stoop at his feet, and crave leave to look up, and speak, and say, Lord, I am justly under the sentence of death; if I fall under it, thou art righteous, and I do here acknowledge it; but there is deliverance in Christ, thither I would have recourse; yet, if I be beaten back, and kept out, and faith withheld from me, and I perish, as it were in view of salvation; if I see the rock, and yet cannot come at it, but drown; what have I to say? In this, likewise, thou art righteous. Only, if it seem good unto thee to save the vilest, most wretched of sinners,

and to show great mercy in pardoning such great debts, the higher will be the glory of that mercy. However, here I am resolved to wait, till either thou graciously receive me, or absolutely reject me. If thou do this, I have not a word to say against it; but because thou art gracious, I hope, I hope thou wilt yet have mercy on me.—I dare say that the promise in the text belongs to such a soul, and "it shall be raised up in due time."

And what though most, or all of our life, should pass without much sensible taste even of spiritual comforts, a poor all it is! Let us not over-esteem this moment, and so think too much of our better or worse condition in it, either in temporals, or even in spirituals, so far as regards such things as are more arbitrary and accessory to the name of our spiritual life. Provided we can humbly wait for free grace, and depend on the word of promise, we are safe. If the Lord will clearly shine on us, and refresh us, this is much to be desired and prized; but if he so think fit, what if we should be all our days held at a distance, and under a cloud of wrath? It is but "a moment in his anger," Psa. xxx. 5; then follows a life-time in his favour, an endless life-time. It is "but weeping," as it there follows, "for a night, and joy comes in the morning," that clearer morning of eternity, to which no evening succeeds.

Ver. 7. Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

Amongst other spiritual secrets, this is one, and a prime one, the combination of lowliness and boldness, humble confidence: this is the true temper of a child of God towards his great and good Father;

nor can any have it, but those who are indeed his children, and have within them that Spirit of adoption which he sends into their hearts, Gal. iv. 6.

And these two the apostle here joins together: "Humble yourselves under the hand of God," and yet, "Cast your care on him:" upon that same hand under which you ought to humble yourselves, must you withal cast over your care, all your care; "for he careth for you."

Consider, I. The nature of this confidence, "Casting all your care on him." II. The ground or warrant of it, "For he careth for you."

I. For the nature of it. Every man hath some desires and purposes that are predominant with him, besides those that relate to the daily exigencies of life with which he is compassed; and in both, according to their importance or his estimate of them, and the difficulties occurring in them, he is naturally carried to be proportionably thoughtful and careful in them. Now, the excess and distemper of this care, is one of the great diseases and miseries of man's life. Moral men, perceiving and feeling it, have been tampering at the cure, and prescribing after their fashion, but with little success. Some present abatement and allay of the paroxysm or extremity, their rules may reach; but they never go near the bottom, the cause of the evil, and therefore cannot work a thorough sound cure of it. Something they have spoken, somewhat fitly, of the surpassing of nature's rule and size in the pursuit of superfluous, needless things; but, for the unavoidable care of things needful, they know no redress, but refer men entirely to their own industry and diligence. They can tell how little will serve him who seeks no more than what will serve, but how to

be provided with that little, or to be assured of it, and freed from troubling care, they cannot tell.

Now, truly it were a great point, to be well instructed in the former; and it is necessary for the due practice of the rule here given, touching necessary cares, first, to cut off cares unnecessary, to retrench all extravagant, superfluous desires. For, certainly, a great part of the troublous cares of men relate merely to such things as have no other necessity in them, than what our disordered desires create, nor truly any real good in them, but what our fancy puts upon them. Some are indeed forced to labour hard for their daily bread; but, undoubtedly, a great deal of the sweat and toil of the greatest part of men is about unnecessaries: *ad supervacua sudatur.* Such an estate, so much by the year, such a place, so much honour, and esteem, and rank in the world, —these are the things that make some slaves to the humours of others, whom they court, and place their dependence on, for these ends; and those, possibly, to whom they are so enthralled, are themselves at as little liberty, but captivated to the humours of some others, either above them, or who being below them, may give accession and furtherance to their ends of enrichment, advancement, or popularity. Men who are set on these things, forge necessities to themselves, and make vain things as necessary as food and raiment, resolving that they will have them, or fall in the chase, being wilfully and unavoidably bent on them. "They that will be rich," says the apostle, 1 Tim. vi. 9, who are resolved on it upon any terms, meet with terms hard enough,—"they fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition." "Drown" them: there is no re-

covering, but still they are plunged deeper and deeper. "Foolish lusts;" unreasonable, childish desires; after one bargain, such another, and after one sin, another to make even, and somewhat then to keep that whole, and so on without end. If their hearts are set upon purchase and land, still some house or neighbour-field, some Naboth's vineyard is in their eyes, and all the rest is nothing without that, which discovers the madness of this humour, this dropsy-thirst.

And this is the first thing, indeed, to be looked to, that our desires and cares be brought to a due compass. And what would we have? Think we that contentment lies in so much, and no less? When that is attained, it shall appear as far off as before. When children are at the foot of a high hill, they think it reaches the heavens, and yet, if they were there, they would find themselves as far off as before, or at least not sensibly nearer. Men think, Oh, had I this, I were well; and when it is reached it is but an advanced standing from which to look higher, and spy out for some other thing.

We are indeed children in this, to think the good of our estate lies in the greatness, and not in the fitness of it for us. He were a fool that would have his clothes so, and think the bigger and longer they were, they would please him the better. And certainly, as in apparel, so in place and estate, and all outward things, their good lies not in their greatness, but in their fitness for us. Our Saviour tells us expressly, that "man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things he possesseth," Luke xii. 15. Think you that great and rich persons live more content? Believe it not. If they will deal freely, they can tell you the contrary; that there is

nothing but a show in them, and that great estates and places have great grief and cares attending them, as shadows are proportioned to their bodies. And if they have no real crosses, luxury frames troubles to itself; like a variety of dishes corrupting the stomach, and causing variety of diseases. And instead of need, they have fantastic vain discontents that will trouble men as much as greater, be it but—this hawk flies not well, or that dog runs not well, to men whose hearts are in those games.

So then, I say, this is first to be regulated: all childish, vain, needless cares are to be discharged, and, as being unfit to cast on thy God, are to be quite cast out of thy heart. Entertain no care at all but such as thou mayest put into God's hands, and make his on thy behalf; such as he will take off thy hand, and undertake for thee.

All needful lawful care, and that only, will he receive. So then, rid thyself quite of all that thou canst not take this course with, and then, without scruple, take confidently this course with all the rest. Seek a well-regulated, sober spirit. In the things of this life, "be content with food and raiment;" not delicates, but "food;" not ornament, but "raiment," *τροφὴν οὐ τρυφὴν, σκεπάσματα οὐ κοσμήματα*; and conclude, that what thy Father carves to thee is best for thee, the fittest measure, for he knows it, and loves thee wisely. This course our Saviour would have thee take, Matt. vi. 31, first, to cut off superfluous care, then, to turn over on thy God the care of what is necessary. He will look to that, thou hast him engaged; and he can and will give thee beyond that, if he see it fit.

Only, this is required of thee, to refer the matter to his discretion entirely. Now, in thy thus well-

regulated affairs and desires, there is a diligent care and study of thy duty; this he lays on thee. There is a care of support in the work, and of the success of it; this thou oughtest to lay on him. And so, indeed, all the care is turned off from thee upon him, even that of duty, which from him lies on us. We offer our service, but for skill and strength to discharge it, that care we lay on him, and he allows us to do so; and then, for the event and success, with that we trust him entirely. And this is the way to walk contentedly and cheerfully homewards, leaning and resting all the way on him, who is both our guide and our strength, who hath us and all our good in his gracious hand. Much zeal for him, and desire of his glory, minding our duty in relation to that, is the thing he requires, and while we are bending our whole care to that, he undertakes the care of us and our condition: as that king said to his favourite, when persuading him to fidelity and diligence in his state-trust, "Do my affairs, and I will do yours." Such a word directly hath St. Chrysostom: Σὺ μερίμνησον τὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ αὐτὸς μεριμνῆσει τὸ σὸν: "If thou have a concern for the things that are God's, he will also be careful of thee and thine."

The care of duty thus carried, is sweet and light, doth not cut and divide the mind; it is united and gathered in God, and rests there, and walks in his hand all the way. He bears the weight of all our works, and "works them in us," and for us; and therein lies our peace, that "He ordains for us," Isa. xxvi. 12. If thou wouldst shake off the yoke of obedience, thou art likewise to be shaken off thyself; but if, in humble diligence in the ways of God, thou walk on in his strength, there is nothing that

concerns thee and thy work, but he will take the charge and care of, thyself and all thine interests. Art thou troubled with fears, enemies, and snares? Untrouble thyself of that, for he is with thee. He hath promised to "lead thee in a straight and safe path," Psa. xxvii. 11, and to rebuke all thine enemies; "to subdue thine iniquities for thee," Micah vii. 19, and to "fight against those that fight against thee," Psa. xxxv. 1. "No weapon formed against thee shall prosper," Isa. liv. 17; "yea, when thou passest through the water, and through the fire, he will be with thee," Isa. xliii. 2. Doth thine own weakness discourage thee? Hath he not engaged for that too? So lay over that care upon him. Hath he not spoken of "strengthening the weak hands, and feeble knees," and said, "that the lame shall leap as an hart?" Isa. xxxv. 3, 6. And though there is nothing in thyself but unrighteousness and weakness, yet there is in him for thee, "righteousness and strength," Isa. xlv. 24,—righteousness, to express the abundance of righteousness. When thou art ready to faint, a look to him will revive thee; a believing look draws in of his strength to thy soul, and renews it, Isa. xl. 29. And know, the more tender and weak thou art, the more tender he is over thee, and the more strong will he be in thee. "He feeds his flock like a shepherd," and the weakest he is the most careful of: they are carried in his arms and his bosom, Isa. xl. 11, and it is easy for the feeblest to go so.

And as for the issue and success of thy way, let not that trouble thee at all: that is the care he would have thee wholly disburden thyself of, and lay entirely upon him. Do not vex thyself with thinking, How will this and that be? What if this and the

other fall out? That is his part wholly, and if thou meddle with it, thou at once displeasest him, and disquietest thyself. This sin carries the punishment of it close tied to it. If thou wilt be struggling with that which belongs not to thee, and poising at that burden which is not thine, what wonder, yea, I may say, what pity if thou fall under it? Art thou not well served? Is it not just, that if thou wilt do for thyself, and bear for thyself, what thy Lord calls for to bear for thee, thou shouldst feel the weight of it to thy cost?

But what is the way of this devolving of my burden? There is a faculty in it that all persons have not: though they would do thus with it, they cannot; it lies on them, and they are not able to cast it on God. The way is, doubtless, by praying and believing: these are the hands by which the soul can turn over to God what itself cannot bear: all cares, the whole bundle, is most dexterously transferred thus. "Be careful in nothing," Phil. iv. 6. A great word! Oh, but how shall it be? Why thus, says he, "In all things make your requests known unto God," and in a confident cheerful way, supplication mixed with thanksgiving; so shall it be the more lively and active to carry forth and carry up thy cares, and discharge thee of them, and lay them on God. Whatsoever it is that presses thee, go tell thy Father; put over the matter into his hand, and so thou shalt be freed from *μερίμνα*, that dividing, perplexing care, which the world is full of.

No more, but when thou art either to do or suffer any thing, when thou art about any purpose or business, go tell God of it, and acquaint him with it; yea, burden him with it, and thou hast done for

matter of caring: no more care, but quiet, sweet diligence in thy duty, and dependence on him for the carriage of thy matters. And in this prayer, faith acts: it is a believing requesting. "Ask in faith, not doubting," James i. 6. So thou rollest over all on him; that is the very proper working of faith, the carrying the soul, and all its desires, out of itself unto God, as expressed, Psa. xxxvii. 5, "Roll over on God,"—make one bundle of all; roll thy cares, and thyself with them, as one burden, all on thy God.

Now faith, to do this, stays itself on the promise. It cannot move but on firm ground, and the promises are its ground; and for this end is this added, "He careth for thee."

This must be established in the heart. 1. The firm belief of the Divine providence, that all things are managed and ruled by it, and that in the highest power and wisdom; that there is no breaking of his purposes, nor resisting of his power. "The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations," Psa. xxxiii. 11. 2. The belief of his gracious providence to his own people, that he orders all for their true advantage, and makes all different lines and ways concentre in their highest good; all to meet in that, how opposite soever in appearance. See Rom. viii. 28. 3. A particular confidence of his good-will towards thee, and undertaking for thee. Now, if this be the question, the promise resolves thee: trust him, and he takes on the trust, and there is no other condition; cast on him thy care, and he takes it on, he cares for thee. His royal word is engaged not to give thee the slip, if thou do really lay it upon him. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord," Psa. lv. 22,—hand it over, heave it upon him,—"and he shall sustain

thee;" shall bear both, if thou trust him with both, both thee and thy burden: "He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved."

Inference 1. The children of God have the only sweet life. The world thinks not so, rather looks on them as poor, discontented, lowering creatures; but it sees not what an uncaring, truly secure life they are called to. While others are turmoiling and wrestling, each with his projects and burdens for himself, and are at length crushed and sinking under them, for that is the end of all that do for themselves, the child of God goes free from the pressure of all that concerns him, it being laid over on his God. If he use his advantage, he is not racked with musings, Oh! what will become of this and that? but goes on in the strength of his God as he may, offers up poor, but sincere endeavours to God, and is sure of one thing, that all shall be well. He lays his affairs and himself on God, and so hath no pressing care; no care but the care of love, how to please, how to honour his Lord. And in this, too, he depends on him, both for skill and strength; and touching the success of things, he leaves that as none of his to be burdened with, casts it on God, and since he careth for it, they need not both care, his care alone is sufficient. Hence springs peace, inconceivable peace. "Be careful for nothing, but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus," Phil. iv. 6, 7.

Inference 2. But truly, the godly are much wanting to themselves, by not improving this their privilege. They too often forget this their sweet

way, and fret themselves to no purpose; they wrestle with their burdens themselves, and do not entirely and freely "roll them over on God." They are surcharged with them, and he calls for them, and yet they will not give them him. They think to spare him, but indeed, in this, they disobey, and dishonour, and so grieve him; and they find the grief return on themselves, and yet cannot learn to be wise.

Why deal we thus with our God and with our souls, grieving both at once? Let it never be, that for any outward thing thou perplex thyself, and ravel thy thoughts, as in thickets, with the cares of this life. Oh, how unsuitable are these to a child of God, for whom a life so far more excellent is provided! Hath he prepared a kingdom for thee, and will he not bestow thy charges in the way to it? Think it not: "He knoweth you have need of these things," Matt. vi. 32. Seek not vain things, nor great things: for these, it is likely, are not fit for thee; but seek what is needful and convenient in his judgment, and refer thyself to that.

Then, as for thy spiritual estate, lay over upon God the care of that too. Be not so much in thorny questionings, doubting and disputing at every step, Oh, is this accepted? and that accepted? and, So much deadness! &c.; but apply thyself more simply to thy duty. Lamely as it may be, halt on, and believe that he is gracious, and pities thee, and lay the care of bringing thee through upon him. Lie not complaining and arguing, but "up, and be doing, and the Lord shall be with thee," 1 Chron. xxii. 16. I am persuaded that many a soul that hath some truth of grace, falls much behind in the progress, by this accustomed way of endless questionings,

Men can scarcely be brought to examine and suspect their own condition, being carnally secure, and satisfied that all is well; but then, when once they awaken and set to this, they are ready to entangle themselves in it, and neglect their way, by poring on their condition. They will not set cheerfully to any thing, because they want assurances and height of joy; and this course they take is the way to want it still. Walking humbly and sincerely, and offering at thy duty, and waiting on the Lord, is certainly the better way, and nearer that very purpose of thine; for "He meeteth him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember him in his ways," Isa. lxiv. 5. One thing the Christian should endeavour to obtain, firm belief for the church: all the care of that must be cast on God, that he "will beautify Zion," and perform all his word to her. And then think, do I trust him for the whole church, and the great affairs concerning it, and shall I doubt him for myself, or any thing that concerns me? Do I confide in him for the steering and guidance of the whole ship, and shall I be peevishly doubting and distrusting about my pack in it?

Again, when in addition to the present and the past, thou callest in after evils by advance, and art still revolving the dangers before, and thy weakness: it is good, indeed, to entertain by these, holy fear and self-distrust; but by that, be driven in to trust on Him who undertakes for thee, on Him in whom thy strength lies, and be as sure and confident in Him, as thou art, and justly art, distrustful of thyself.

Further, learn to proscribe nothing. Study entire resignation, for that is thy great duty and thy peace; that gives up all into the hand of thy Lord —and can it be in a better hand? First, refer the

carving of outward things to him, heartily and fully. Then, stay not there, but go higher. If we have renounced the comforts of this world for God, let us add this, renounce even spiritual comforts for him too. Put all in his will: If I be light, blessed be thou; and if in darkness, even then, blessed be thou too. As he saith of earthly treasures, "Gold is mine, and silver is mine;" (and this may satisfy a Christian in those two, to desire no more of them than his Father sees fit to give, knowing that he, having all the mines and treasures of the world at his command, would not pinch and hold short his children, if it were good for them to have more;) even thus it is in respect to the other, the true riches: Is not the Spirit mine, may God say, and all comforts mine? I have them to bestow, and enough of them. And ought not this to allay thy afflicting care, and to quiet thy repinings, and establish thy heart in referring it to his disposal, as touching thy comforts and supplies? The whole golden mines of all spiritual comfort and good are his, and the Spirit itself. Then, will he not furnish what is fit for thee, if thou humbly attend on him, and lay the care of providing for thee upon his wisdom and love? This were the sure way to honour him with what we have, and to obtain much of what we have not; for certainly he deals best with those that do most absolutely refer all to him.

Ver. 8. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

9. Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

The children of God, if they rightly take their

Father's mind, are always disburdened of perplexing carefulness, but never exempted from diligent watchfulness. Thus we find here, they are allowed, yea, enjoined to cast all their care upon their wise and loving Father, and are secured by his care. He takes it well that they lay all over on him; yea, he takes it not well when they forbear him, and burden themselves. He hath provided a sweet quiet life for them, could they improve and use it: a calm and firm condition in all the storms and troubles that are about them; however things go, to find content, and "be careful for nothing."

Now, upon this, a carnal heart would imagine straight, according to its sense and inclination,—as it desires to have it, so would it dream that it is,—that then, a man devolving his care on God, may give up all watch and ward, and needs not apply himself to any kind of duty. But this is the ignorant and perverse mistake, the reasonless reasoning of the flesh. You see these are here joined, not only as agreeable, but indeed inseparable: "Cast all your care on him, for he careth for you," and withal, "Be sober, be vigilant."

And this is the Scripture logic. "It is he that worketh in you to will and to do," Phil. ii. 13. Then would you possibly think, I need not work at all; or if I do, it may be very easily and securely? No: "therefore," says the apostle, because he worketh in you to will and to do, "work out your salvation;" yea, and do it "with fear and trembling;" work you in humble obedience to his command, and in dependence on him who "worketh all in you."

Thus, here, "Cast your care on him," not that you may be the more free to take your own pleasure and slothful ease, but, on the contrary, that you may

be the more active and apt to watch: being freed from the burden of vexing carefulness, which would press and encumber you, you are the more nimble, as one eased of a load, to walk, and work, and watch as becomes a Christian. And for this very purpose is that burden taken off from you, that you may be more able and disposed for every duty that is laid upon you.

Observe these two as connected, and thence gather,—First, There is no right believing without diligence and watchfulness joined with it. That slothful reliance of most souls on blind thoughts of mercy will undo them; their faith is a "dead faith," and a deadly faith; they are perishing and will not consider it. Such persons do not duly cast their care on God for their souls, for indeed they have no such care. Second, There is no right diligence without believing.

There is, as in other affairs, so even in spiritual things, an anxious perplexing care, which is a distemper and disturbance to the soul; it seems to have a heat of zeal and affection in it, but is, indeed, not the natural right heat that is healthful, and enables for action, but a diseased, feverish heat, that puts all out of frame, and unfits for duty. It seems to stir and further, but indeed it hinders, and does not hasten us, but so as to make us stumble: as if there was one behind a man driving and thrusting him forward, and not suffering him to set and order his steps in his course; this were the ready way, instead of advancing him, to weary him, and possibly give him a fall.

Such is the distrustful care that many have in their spiritual course: they raise a hundred questions about the way of their performances, and their

acceptance, and their estate, and the issue of their endeavours. Indeed, we should endeavour to do all by our rule, and to walk exactly, and examine our ways; especially in holy things, to seek some insight and faculty in their performance, suiting their nature and end, and his greatness and purity whom we worship. This should be minded diligently, and yet calmly and composedly; for diffident doubtings do retard and disorder all. But quiet stayedness of heart on God, dependence on him, on his strength for performance, and his free love in Christ for acceptance, this makes the work go kindly and sweetly on, makes it pleasing to God, and refreshing to thy soul.

Inference. Certainly, thou art a vexation to thyself, and displeasest thy Lord, when thou art questioning whether thou shalt go on or not, from finding in thy service so much deadness and hardness; thinking, therefore, that it were as good to do nothing —that thou dost but dishonour him in all. Now, thou considerest not, that in these very thoughts thou dost more wrong and dishonour him than in thy worst services; for thou callest in question his lenity and goodness, takest him for a rigorous exacter, yea, representest him to thyself as a hard Master, who is the most gentle and gracious of all masters. Do not use him so. Indeed, thou oughtest to "take heed to thy foot," to see how thy heart is affected in his worship. Keep and watch it as thou canst, but in doing so, or in endeavouring to do, however thou find it, do not think he will use rigours with thee; but the more thou observest thine own miscarriages towards him, the less severely will he observe them. To think otherwise, to fret and repine that thy heart is not to his mind, or indeed to

thine own, to go on in a discontented impatience, this is certainly not the commanded watchfulness, but that forbidden carefulness.

"Be sober." This we have formerly spoken of, the apostle having formerly exhorted to it once and again in this Epistle. It were easy to entertain men's minds with new discourse, if our task were rather to please than to profit; for there are many things which, with little labour, might be brought forth as new and strange to ordinary hearers. But there are a few things which chiefly concern us to know and practise, and these are to be more frequently represented and pressed. This apostle, and other inspired writers, drew from too full a spring to be ebb* of matter; but they rather chose profitable iterations, than unprofitable variety; and so ought we.

This sobriety is not only temperance in meat and drink, but in all things that concern the flesh. Even that of diet is, though not all, yet a very considerable part of it; and this not only hath implied in it, that one exceed not in the quantity or quality, but even requires a regulating of ourselves in the manner of using our repast; that as we are not to make careful and studious provision, or to take up our thoughts how to please our palate, so, even in the use of sober, mean diet, we endeavour the mortifying of our flesh, not to eat and drink merely to please ourselves, or to satisfy our natural desire, but for God; even to propound this in our sitting down to it, in obedience to him; to use these helps of life, and the life itself, to be spent in his obedience, and in endeavouring to advance his glory.

It is a most shameful idol, a dunghill-god indeed, to serve the belly, and to delight in feastings, or in

* Deficient.

our ordinary repast, laying the reins loose on our appetite to take its own career. And yet, in this, men most commonly offend, even persons that are not notably intemperate, neither gluttonous nor drunken, and yet, I say, have not that holy, retained, bridled way of using their repast, with an eye upon a higher end.

But this sobriety, in its ample sense, binds not only that sense of lust, but all the rest, in the use of their several delights, yea, and in the whole man, all the affections of the soul, in relation to this world, and the things of it: we are to be in it as weaned from it, and raised above it in the bent of our minds; to use it as if we used it not, 1 Cor. vii. 31.

This we speak and hear of, but do not apply ourselves really to this rule. Each hath some trifle or earthly vanity, one or more, but especially some choice one, that he cannot be taken off from; as children readily have some toy that they set more by than the rest. We have childish hearts cleaving to vanity; one hankering after some preferment, another after some estate, lands, or houses, or money. And we are drunk in the pursuit of these, so that when our hearts should be fixed on Divine exercises they cannot stand, but reel to and fro, or stumble down and fall asleep, roving after those thoughts of that which we affect, staggering ever and anon, or else so plunged in them all the time, that we are as asleep in them.

Therefore, these two are here, and ordinarily, joined, "Be sober and watchful." Glutting ourselves either with the delights or with the desires and cares of earth, makes us sleepy: the fumes that arise from them surcharge us, and cast us into a

deep sleep,—a secure unminding of God and of ourselves, the interest of our immortal souls.

The pleasures of sense are too gross for the divine soul. Divine, I call it, for so by original it is; but we abase it, and make it flesh by those gross earthly things, and make it unfit to rise heavenwards. As insobriety, intemperance in diet, prejudices the very natural spirits, making them dull, clogs their passage, and makes them move as a coach in a miry way, thus doth all inordinate use and love of inferior things: it makes the soul of a low, heavy constitution, so that it cannot move freely in any thing that is spiritual. Yea, where there is some truth of grace, yet it is obstructed and dulled by taking in too much of the world, and feeding on it; which is no more proper for the finest part of the man, for the soul, than the coarse ploughman's diet is for delicate, tender bodies of higher breeding; yea, the disproportion is far greater.

If, then, you would have free spirits for spiritual things, keep them at a spare diet in all things temporal. Let not out your hearts to any thing here below. Learn to delight in God, and seek to taste of his transcendent sweetness: that will perfectly disrelish all lower delights. So your sobriety in abstaining from them shall be still further recompensed with more enjoyment of God, and you shall not lose pleasure by denying yourself the pleasures of earth, but shall change them for those that are unspeakably better and purer. He shall communicate himself unto you, the "light of whose countenance" feeds and satisfies the glorified spirits that are about his throne.

"Be vigilant." This watchfulness, joined with

sobriety, extends to all the estates and ways of a Christian, being surrounded with hazards and snares. "He that despiseth his ways shall die," says Solomon, Prov. xix. 16. The most do thus walk at random: they give attendance on public worship, and have some customary way of private prayer, but do not further regard how they walk, what is their carriage all the day long, what they speak, how they are in company, and how alone, which way their hearts go early and late, what it is that steals away most of their affection from God.

O, my beloved, did we know our continual danger, it would shake us out of this miserable dead security that possesses us. We think not on it, but there are snares laid for us all the way, in every path we walk in, and every step of it; in our meat and drink; in our calling and labour; in our house at home; in our journeying abroad; yea, even in God's house, and in our spiritual exercises, both there and in private. Knew we, or at least, considered we this, we should choose our steps more exactly, and look to our ways, to our words, to our thoughts, which truly, whatsoever noise we make, we really do not. "Ponder the path of thy feet," says Solomon; and before that, "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee." And further, "Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee." But, first of all, as the main reason and spring of all, "Keep thy heart with all diligence," or above all keeping; "for out of it are the issues of life," Prov. iv. 23—26.

"Because your adversary the devil." An alarm to watchfulness is here given, from the watchfulness of our grand adversary. There are other two usually ranked with him, as the leading enemies of our souls,

the world, and our own flesh; but here, he is expressly named, who commands in chief, and orders and manages the war, using the service of the other two against us, as prime officers, under whom most of the forces of particular temptations are ranked. Some others there are which he immediately commands and leads on himself, a regiment of his own, some spiritual temptations.

And we have need to be put in mind of the hostility and practices of Satan against us; for if the most were put to it, they would be forced to confess that they very seldom think on their spiritual danger from this hand. As we keep loose guard against the allurements of the world, and of our own corruptions, so we watch not against the devices of Satan, but go on by guess, and suspect nothing, and so are easily a prey to all.

The least enemy, being despised and neglected, as men observe, proves often too great. The smallest appearances of evil, the least things that may prejudice our spiritual good, while we make no reckoning of them, may do us great mischief. Our not considering them makes them become considerable, especially being under the command of a vigilant and skilful leader, who knows how to improve advantages. Therefore, in things which we many times account petty, and not worthy our notice, as having any evil in them, we should learn to suspect the address of this adversary, who usually hides himself, and couches under some covert, till he may appear irresistible, and seize on us: and then, indeed, he *roars*.

And this seeking the destruction of souls is, you see, marked as all his work. The prey he hunts is souls, that they may be as miserable as himself.

Therefore he is justly called "our adversary," the enemy of holiness, and of our souls; first tempting to sin, and then accusing for sin, as his name here imports; appearing against us upon the advantages he hath gained. He studies our nature, and fits his temptations to it: he knows the prevalence of lust, or earthliness, or that great and most general evil of pride, so like himself, and that is his throne in the heart. Sometimes "he boweth down," as it is said of the lion, Psa. x. 9; he waits his opportunity craftily, and then assaults fiercely. And the children of God find sometimes so much violence in his temptations, that they surprise them; such horrid thoughts cast in as poisoned arrows, or "fiery darts," as the apostle speaks, Eph. vi. 16. And this his enmity, though it is against man in general, yet is most enraged against the children of God. He goes about and spies where they are weakest, and amongst them, directs his attacks most against those who are most advanced in holiness, and nearest unto God. They were once under his power, and now being escaped from him, he pursues them, as Pharaoh did the Israelites, with all his forces, raging and roaring after them, as a prey that was once in his den, and under his paw, and now is rescued.

The resemblance hath in it, his strength, his diligence, and his cruelty. His strength, "a lion;" his diligence, "going about and seeking;" his cruelty, "roaring," and "seeking to devour."

Inference. Is it not most reasonable hence to press watchfulness; to keep continual watch, to see what comes in, and what goes out; to try what is under every offer of the world, every motion of our own natural hearts, whether there be not some treachery, some secret intelligence, or not? Especially

after a time of some special seasons of grace, and some special new supplies of grace, received in such seasons, (as after the holy sacrament,) then will he set on most eagerly, when he knows of the richest booty. The pirates that let the ships pass as they go by empty, watch them well when they return richly laden: so doth this great pirate. Did he not assault our Saviour straight after his baptism? *ὁ πειράζων*, Matt. iv. 3.

And that we may "watch," it concerns us "to be sober." The instruction is military: a drunken soldier is not fit to be on the watch. This most of us are, with our several fancies and vanities, and so exposed to this adversary. And when we have gained some advantage in a conflict, or when the enemy seems to retire and be gone, yet, even then, are we to be watchful; yea, then especially. How many, presuming on false safeties that way, and sitting down to carouse, or lying down to sleep, have been re-assaulted and cut off! *Invadunt urbem somno vinoque sepultam.* Oh, beware when you think yourselves most safe! That very thought makes you least safe. Keep always your spirits free from surcharges, and lavish profusion upon the world: keep from applying your hearts to any thing in it, sitting down to it. Oh! no. Be like Gideon's army, fit to follow God, and to be victorious in him, not lying down to drink, but taking of it only as for necessity, in passing. Take our Saviour's own word, "Take heed, lest at any time your hearts be surcharged with surfeitings and drunkenness, and the cares of this life," Luke xxi. 34. These will "overcharge" you, and make you drunk, and cast you asleep.

O, mind your work, and your warfare always,

more than your ease and pleasure! Seek it not here; your rest is not here. Oh, poor short rest, if it were! But follow the Lord Jesus through conflicts and sufferings. A little while, and you shall have certain victory, and after it everlasting triumph, rest and pleasure, and a feast that shall not end, where there is no danger either of surfeiting or of wearying, but pure and perpetual delight. In this persuasion you should be abstinent and watchful, and "endure hardship, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ," as the apostle speaks, 2 Tim. ii. 3, 4, "not entangling yourselves with the affairs of this life," and thus be ready for encounters. Stand watching, and if you be assaulted, "resist."

"Whom resist, stedfast in the faith." To watchfulness courage should be joined. He that watches and yields, seems rather to watch to receive, than to resist the enemy.

And this resistance should be continued even against multiplied assaults; for thou hast to deal with an enemy that will not easily give over, but will try several ways, and will redouble his onsets;* sometimes very thick, to weary thee out; sometimes after a little forbearance interposed, to catch thee unawares, when he is not expected. But in all, faint not, but be stedfast in thy resistance.

This is easily said, say you, but how may it be? How shall I be able so to do? Thus:

"Stedfast in the faith." The most of men are under the power of one of these two evils—security, or distrust; and out of the one, we readily fall into the other. Therefore the apostle frames his

* Οὐ δίδωσιν ἀνάπαυσιν, οὐδὲ νικῶν, οὐδὲ νικωμενος. Plutarch in Vita Marcel.

exhortations, and the arguments in support of it, in opposition to both these: first, against security in the former verse, "Be sober, and watch," and presses that by the proper argument of great and continuing danger; here against distrust, "Whom resist, stedfast in the faith;" and he adds an encouraging consideration of the common condition of the children of God in the world. "Knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren."

"Stedfast," or solid, "by faith." This is absolutely necessary for resistance. A man cannot fight upon a quagmire; there is no standing out without a standing, some firm ground to tread upon; and this faith alone furnishes. It lifts the soul up to the firm advanced ground of the promises, and fastens it there; and there it is sure, even "as Mount Zion, that cannot be removed." He says not, stedfast by your own resolutions and purposes, but "stedfast by faith." The power of God by faith becomes ours; for that is contained and engaged in the word of promise. Faith lays hold there, and there finds Almighty strength. "And this is our victory," says the apostle St. John, "whereby we overcome the world, even our faith," 1 John v. 4. So faith is our victory, whereby we overcome "the prince of this world." "Whom resist, stedfast in the faith." And, universally, all difficulties, and all enemies, are overcome by faith. Faith sets the stronger "Lion of the tribe of Judah," against this "roaring lion" of the bottomless pit; that delivering Lion, against this devouring lion.

When the soul is surrounded with enemies on all hands, so that there is no way of escape, faith flies above them, and carries up the soul to take refuge in Christ, and is there safe. That is the power of

faith; it sets a soul in Christ, and there it looks down upon all temptations as at the bottom of the rock, breaking themselves into foam. When the floods of temptations rise and gather, so great and so many that the soul is even ready to be swallowed up, then, by faith, it says, Lord Jesus, thou art my strength, I look to thee for deliverance; now appear for my help! And thus it overcomes. The guilt of sin is answered by his blood, the power of sin is conquered by his Spirit; and afflictions that arise are nothing to these; his love and gracious presence makes them sweet and easy.

We mistake, if we think to do any thing, or to be any thing, without him; and we mistake again, if we think any thing too hard to be done or suffered with him. "Without me ye can do nothing," says he, John xv. 5; and "I am able to do all things," says the apostle, or, "can do all things," *πάντα ἰσχύω*, (so the word is,) "through Christ that strengthens me," Phil. iv. 13. All things! Oh, that is a big word, yet it is a true word; and thus made good—through Christ empowering me; that frees it both from falsehood and vanity. An humble confidence, for it is not in himself, but in Christ; and this boasting is good. "My soul shall make her boast in God," says David, Psa. xxxiv. 2. Oh, they alone have warrant to boast and to triumph, even before the victory, who do it in this style? Such may give a challenge to all the world, to all adverse powers of earth and hell, as the apostle doth in his own and every believer's name, Rom. viii. 35, 38, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" &c. See the victory recorded in this same way, Rev. xii. 11, "And they overcame him"—but how?—"by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their

testimony." That blood, and the word of their testimony, believing that word concerning that blood, these are the strength and victory of a Christian.

Inference. Although, then, thou seest thyself the most witless and weak, and findest thyself nothing but a prey to the powers of darkness, yet know that by believing, the wisdom and strength of Christ are thine. Thou art, and oughtest to find thyself, all weakness; but He is all strength, Almightiness itself. Learn to apply his victory, and so it is thine. Be strong—how?—"in him, and the power of his might." But thou wilt say, I am often foiled, yea, I cannot find that I prevail at all against mine enemies, but they still against me. Yet rely on him; he can turn the chase in an instant. Still cleave to him. When the whole powers of thy soul are, as it were, scattered and routed, rally them by believing. Draw thou but into the standard of Jesus Christ, and the day shall be thine; for victory follows that standard, and cannot be severed from it. Yea, though thou find the smart of divers strokes, yet, think that often a wounded soldier hath won the day. Believe, and it shall be so with thee.

And remember that thy defeats, through the wisdom and love of thy God, may be ordered to advance the victory; to put courage and holy anger into thee against thine enemies; to humble thee, and drive thee from thine own imagined strength, to make use of his real strength. And be not hasty; think not at the very first to conquer. Many a hard conflict must thou resolve upon, and often shalt thou be brought very low, almost to a desperate point, to thy sense, past recovery; then it is His time to step in, even in the midst of their prevailing. "Let God" but "arise, and his enemies shall be scattered,

Psa. lxviii. 1. Thus the church hath found it in her greatest extremities, and thus likewise the believer's soul.

"Knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world." There is one thing that much troubles the patience and weakens the faith of some Christians; they are ready to think there is no one, yea, that there never was any one, beloved of God in such a condition as theirs. Thus sometimes they swell even their outward trials in imagination, but oftener their inward ones, which are most heavy and pressing to themselves, and the parallel of them in others least discernible by them. Therefore the apostle St. Paul breaks this conceit, "No temptation hath taken you, but such as is common to men," 1 Cor. x. 13. And here is the same truth, "The same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren."

But we had rather hear of ease, and cannot, after all that is said, bring our hearts to comply with this, that temptations and troubles are the saints' portion here, and that this is the royal way to the kingdom. Our King led in it, and all his followers go the same way; and besides the happy end of it, is it not sweet, even for this, simply, because he went in it? Yet, this is the truth, and, taken altogether, is a most comfortable truth: the whole brotherhood, "all our brethren," go in it, and our Eldest Brother went first.

Ver. 10. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.

His divine doctrine and exhortations, the apostle closes with prayer, as we follow this rule in public

after the word preached. So St. Paul frequently did, and so Christ himself, John xvii., after his sermon in the preceding chapters. It were well if both ministers and people would follow the same way more, in private, each for themselves, and each for the other. The want of this is mainly the thing that makes our preaching and hearing so barren and fruitless. The ministers of the gospel should indeed be as the angels of God, going betwixt him and his people; not only bringing down useful instructions from God to them, but putting up earnest supplications to God for them. In the tenth chapter of St. Luke, the disciples are sent forth and appointed to preach; and in the eleventh, we have them desiring to be taught to pray; "Lord, teach us to pray." And, without this, there can be little answer or success in the other; little springing up of this seed, though ministers sow it plentifully in preaching, unless they secretly water it with their prayers and their tears.

And people, truly, should keep some correspondence in this duty, and that, if other obligation will not persuade, even for their own advantage; for it returns unto them with abundant interest. If much of the Spirit be poured forth on ministers, are they not the more able to unfold the spiritual mysteries of the gospel, and to build up their people in the knowledge of them? Oh that both of us were more abundant in this rich and sweet exercise!

"But the God of all grace, who hath called us to eternal glory by Christ Jesus." This prayer suits the apostle St. Paul's word, in his direction to the Philippians, ch. iv. ver. 6; it is "supplication with thanksgiving," prayer with praise. In the prayer or petition, consider, 1. The matter, and, 2. The style.

The matter, or thing requested, is expressed in divers brief words, "Make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you;" which, though they be much of the same sense, yet are not superfluously multiplied, for they carry both the great importance of the thing, and the earnest desire in asking it. And though it be a little light and unsolid, to frame a different sense to each of them, nor are any of the ways that such interpreters have taken in it very satisfactory to any discerning judgment; yet I conceive they are not altogether without some profitable difference. The first, "perfect," implies, more clearly than the rest, their advancement in victory over their remaining corruptions and infirmities, and their progress towards perfection. "Stablish," hath more express reference to both the inward lightness and inconstancy that are natural to us, and the counter-blasts of persecutions and temptations, outward oppositions; and it imports the curing of the one, and support against the other. "Strengthen," has reference to the growth of their graces, especially the gaining of further measures of those graces wherein they are weakest and lowest. And "settle," though it seems the same, and in substance is the same with the other word, "stablish," yet it adds somewhat to it very worthy of consideration; for it signifies, to found or fix upon a sure foundation, and so, indeed, may have an aspect to Him who is the foundation and strength of believers, on whom they build by faith, even Jesus Christ, in whom we have all, both victory over sin, and increase of grace, and establishment of spirit, and power to persevere against all difficulties and assaults. He is that corner foundation-stone laid in Zion, that they that build upon him may not be ashamed, Isa. xxviii. 16; that

Rock which upholds the house founded on it, in the midst of all winds and storms, Matt. vii. 24, 25.

Observe, 1. These expressions have in them that which is primarily to be sought after by every Christian, perseverance and progress in grace. These two are here interwoven; for there are two words importing the one, and two the other, and they are interchangeably placed. This is often urged on Christians as their duty, and accordingly ought they to apply themselves to it, and use their highest diligence in it; not to take the beginning of Christianity for the end of it, to think it enough if they are entered into the way of it, and to sit down upon the entry; but to walk on, "to go from strength to strength," and even through the greatest difficulties and discouragements, to pass forward with unmoved stability and fixedness of mind. They ought to be aiming at perfection. It is true, we shall still fall exceedingly short of it; but the more we study it, the nearer shall we come to it; the higher we aim, the higher shall we shoot, though we shoot not so high as we aim.

It is an excellent life, and it is the proper life of a Christian, to be daily outstripping himself, to be spiritually wiser, holier, more heavenly-minded to-day than yesterday, and to-morrow, if it be added to his life, than to-day; *Suavissima vita est indies sentire se fieri meliorem:* every day loving the world less, and Christ more, than on the former, and gaining every day some further victory over his secret corruptions; having his passions more subdued and mortified, his desires in all temporal things more cool and indifferent, and in spiritual things more ardent; that miserable lightness of spirit cured, and his heart rendered more solid and fixed upon God,

aspiring to more near communion with him, and labouring that particular graces may be made more lively and strong, by often exercising and stirring them up; faith more confirmed and stayed, love more inflamed, composed meekness producing more deep humility. Oh, this were a worthy ambition indeed! You would have your estates growing, and your credit growing; how much rather should you seek to have your graces growing, and not be content with any thing you have attained to!

Observe, 2. But all our endeavours and diligence in this will be vain, unless we look for our perfecting and establishing from that "right hand," without which we can do nothing. Thither the apostle moves his desires for his brethren, and so teaches them the same address for themselves: "The God of all grace make you perfect."

This prayer is grounded, as all prayer of faith must be, on the promise and covenant of God. He "is our Rock, and his work is perfect," Deut. xxxii. 4. He doth not begin a building, and then leave it off: none of his designs break in the middle, or fall short of their end. "He will perfect that good work which he hath begun, to the day of Jesus Christ," Phil. i. 6. And how often is he called the strength of those that trust in him, their buckler, and his way perfect? Psa. xviii. 30.

Hence is the stability of grace, the perseverance of the saints; it is founded upon his unchangeableness. Not that they are unchangeable, though truly sanctified, if they and their graces were left to their own management: no, it is he who not only gives that rich portion to those he adopts to be his children, but keeps it for them, and them in the possession of it. He "maintains the lot of our

inheritance," Psa. xvi. 5. And to build that persuasion of perseverance upon his truth and power engaged in it, is no presumption; yea, it is high dishonour to him to question it.

But when nature is set to judge of grace, it must speak according to itself, and therefore very unsuitably to that which it speaks of. Natural wits apprehend not the spiritual tenor of the covenant of grace, but model it to their own principles, and quite disguise it: they think of nothing but their resolves and moral purposes; or if they take up with some confused notion of grace, they imagine it put into their own hands, to keep or to lose it, and will not stoop to a continual dependence on the strength of another, rather choosing that game of hazard, though it is certain loss and undoing, to do for themselves.

But the humble believer is otherwise taught; he "hath not so learned Christ." He sees himself beset with enemies without, and buckled to a treacherous heart within, that will betray him to them; and he dares no more trust himself to himself, than to his most professed enemies. Thus it ought to be, and the more the heart is brought to this humble petitioning for that ability, and strengthening, and perfecting, from God, the more shall it find both stability, and peace from the assurance of that stability.

And certainly, the more the Christian is acquainted with himself, the more will he go out of himself for his perfecting and establishing. He finds that when he thinks to go forward, he is driven backward, and that sin gets hold of him oftentimes when he thought to have smitten it. He finds that such is the miserable inconstancy of his heart in spiritual

things, the vanishing of his purposes and breaking off of his thoughts, that they usually die ere they are brought forth: so that when he hath thought, I will pray more reverently, and set myself to behold God when I speak to him, and watch more over my heart, that it fly not out, and leave me,—possibly the first time he sets to it, thinking to be master of his intention, he finds himself more scattered, and disordered, and dead, than at any time before. When he hath conceived thoughts of humility and self-abasement, and thinks, Now I am down, and laid low within myself, to rise and look big no more,—some vain fancy creeps in anon, and encourages him, and raises him up to his old estate; so that in this plight, had he not higher strength to look at, he would sit down and give over all, as utterly hopeless of ever attaining to his journey's end.

But when he considers whose work that is within him, even these small beginnings of desires, he is encouraged by the greatness of the work, not to despise and despair of the small appearance of it in its beginning, not to despise the day of small things, Zech. iv. 10, and knowing that it is "not by any power, nor by might, but by his Spirit," that it shall be accomplished, he lays hold on that word, "Though thy beginning be small, yet thy latter end shall greatly increase," Job viii. 7.

The believer "looks to Jesus," [ἀφορωντες,] Heb. xii. 2,—looks off from all oppositions and difficulties, looks above them to Jesus, "the Author and Finisher of our faith;" "Author," and therefore "Finisher." Thus, that royal dignity is interested in the maintenance and completion of what he hath wrought. Notwithstanding all thy imperfections, and the strength of sin, he can and will subdue it.

Notwithstanding thy condition is so light and loose, that it were easy for any wind of temptation to blow thee away, yet he shall hold thee in his right hand, and there thou shalt be firm as the earth, that is so settled by his hand, that though it hangs on nothing, yet nothing can remove it. Though thou art weak, he is strong; and it is he that strengthens thee, and renews thy strength, Isa. xl. 28; when it seems to be gone and quite spent, he makes it fresh, and greater than ever before. The word here rendered "renew," signifies *change:* they shall have, for their own, His strength. A weak believer, and his strong Saviour, will be too hard for all that can rise against them. It is here fit, as in statues, *hominem cum basi metiri,* "to measure the man with the basis on which he stands;" and there is no taking the right measure of a Christian but in that way.

Thou art now, indeed, exposed to great storms and tempests, but he builds thee on himself, makes thee, by believing, to found on him; and so, though the winds blow, and the rain fall, yet thou standest, being built on him, thy Rock. And this, indeed, is our safety, the more we cleave to our Rock, and fasten on him. This is the only thing that establishes us, and perfects, and strengthens us; therefore, well is that word added, θεμελιώσαι, found you, or settle you on your foundation. This is the firmness of the church against the gates of hell; He is a strong foundation for its establishment, and a living foundation, having influence into the building, for perfecting it; for it is a living house, and the foundation is a root sending life into the stones, so that "they grow up," as this apostle speaks, ch. ii. 4.

It is the inactivity of faith on Jesus, that keeps us so imperfect, and wrestling still with our corrup-

tions, without any advancement. We wrestle in our own strength too often, and so are justly, yea, necessarily, foiled; it cannot be otherwise till we make Him our strength. This we are still forgetting, and had need to be put in mind of, and ought frequently to remind ourselves. We would be at doing for ourselves, and insensibly fall into this folly, even after much smarting for it, if we be not watchful against it. There is this wretched natural independency in us, that is so hard to beat out. All our projectings are but castles in the air, imaginary buildings without a foundation, till once laid on Christ. But never shall we find heart-peace, sweet peace, and progress in holiness, till we be driven from it, to make Him all our strength; till we be brought to do nothing, to attempt nothing, to hope or expect nothing, but in Him; and then shall we indeed find his fulness and all-sufficiency, and "be more than conquerors through Him who hath loved us."

"But the God of all grace." By reason of our many wants and great weakness, we had need to have a very full hand and a very strong hand to go to for our supplies and for support. And such we have indeed: our Father is the "God of all grace," a spring that cannot be drawn dry, no, nor so much as any whit diminished.

"The God of all grace:" the God of imputed grace, of infused and increased grace, of furnished and assisting grace. The work of salvation is all grace from beginning to end. Free grace in the plan of it, laid in the counsel of God, and performed by his own hand all of it; his Son sent in the flesh, and his Spirit sent into the hearts of his chosen, to apply Christ. All grace is in him, the living spring of it, and flows from him; all the various actings,

and all the several degrees of grace. He is the God of pardoning grace, who "blotteth out the transgressions of his own children, for his own name's sake," Isa. xliii. 25, who takes up all quarrels, and makes one act of oblivion serve for all reckonings betwixt him and them. And, as he is the God of pardoning grace, so withal, the God of sanctifying grace, who refines and purifies all those he means to make up into vessels of glory, and hath in his hand all the fit means and ways of doing this; purifies them by afflictions and outward trials, by the reproaches and hatreds of the world. The profane world little know how serviceable they are to the graces and comforts of a Christian, when they dishonour and persecute him; yea, little doth a Christian himself sometimes think how great his advantage is by those things, till he finds it, and wonders at his Father's wisdom and love. But most powerfully are the children of God sanctified by the Spirit within them, without which, indeed, no other thing could be of any advantage to them in this. That Divine fire kindled within them, is daily refining and sublimating them, that Spirit of Christ conquering sin, and by the mighty flame of his love, consuming the earth and dross that is in them; making their affections more spiritual and disengaged from all creature-delights. And thus, as they receive the beginnings of grace freely, so all the advances and increases of it; life from their Lord still flowing and causing them to grow, abating the power of sin, strengthening a fainting faith, quickening a languishing love, teaching the soul the ways of wounding strong corruptions, and fortifying its weak graces; yea, in wonderful ways advancing the good of his children by things not only harsh to them, as

afflictions and temptations, but by that which is directly opposite in its nature, sin itself; raising them by their falls, and strengthening them by their very troubles; working them to humility and vigilance, and sending them to Christ for strength, by the experience of their weaknesses and failings.

And as he is the God of pardoning grace, and of sanctifying grace in the beginning and growth of it, so also the God of supporting grace, of that supervenient influence without which the graces placed within us would lie dead and fail us in the time of greatest need. This is the immediate assisting power that bears up the soul under the hardest services, and backs it in the sharpest conflicts, communicating fresh auxiliary strength, when we, with all the grace we have dwelling within us, are surcharged. Then he steps in, and opposes his strength to a prevailing and confident enemy that is at the point of insulting and triumph. When temptations have made a breach, and enter with full force and violence, he lets in so much present help on a sudden, as makes them give back, and beats them out. "When the enemy comes in as a flood, the Spirit of the Lord lifts up a standard against him," Isa. lix. 19; and no siege can be so close as to keep out this aid, for it comes from above.

And by this, a Christian learns that his strength is in God; whereas, if his received grace were always party enough, and able to make itself good against all incursions, though we know we have received it, yet being within us, we should possibly sometimes forget the receipt of it, and look on it more as ours than as his; more as being within us, than as flowing from him. But when all the forces we have, the standing garrison, are by far overmatched, and yet

we find the assailants beaten back, then we must acknowledge him who sends such seasonable relief, to be, as the psalmist speaks, "a very present help in trouble," Psa. xlvi. 1.

All St. Paul's constant strength of grace inherent in him, could not fence him so well, as to ward off the piercing point of that sharp temptation, whatsoever it was, which he records, 2 Cor. xii. 7. The redoubled buffetings that he felt, came so thick upon him, that he was driven to his knees by it, to cry for help to be sent down, without which he found he could not hold out; and he had an answer assuring him of help, a secret support that should maintain him: "My grace is sufficient for thee:" which denotes, though thine own be not, that is, the grace which I have already given thee, yet MINE is; that is, the grace which is in me, and which I will put forth for thy assistance.

And this is our great advantage and comfort, that we have a Protector who is Almighty, and who is always at hand, who can and will hear us whensoever we are beset and straitened. That captain had reason, who, on being required to keep Milan for the king of France, went up to the highest turret, and cried out three times, "King of France," and then refused the service, because the king heard him not, and nobody answered for him; meaning to imply the great distance, and so the difficulty of sending aid, when need should require. But we may be confident of our supplies in the most sudden surprisals. Our King can, and will hear us when we call, and will send relief in due season. We may be in apparent hazards, but we shall not be wholly vanquished; it is but crying to him in our greatest straits, and help appears. Possibly we see the host

of enemies first, and that so great that there is no likelihood of escaping, but then, praying, we espy the fiery chariots and horsemen, and may say, There are more with us than with them, 2 Kings vi. 16.

The apostle St. Paul calls our God, "the God of all consolation," Rom. xv. 5; as here he is styled "the God of all grace." And this is our rejoicing, that in his hand is all good, our sanctification and consolation, assistance and assurance, "grace and glory." And this style suits most fitly with the present petition, that for our perfecting, and stablishing, and strengthening in grace, we have recourse to the God of all grace, whose former gifts do not discourage us from seeking more, but indeed both encourage us, and engage him for the perfecting of it. It is his will, that we have constant recourse to him for all we want. He is so rich, and withal so liberal, that he delights in our seeking and drawing much from him; and it is by believing and praying, that we do draw from him. Were these plied, we should soon grow richer. But remember, all this grace that we would receive from the God of all grace, must be from "God in Christ." There it flows for us, and thither we are directed. It was the Father's good pleasure, "that in him should all fulness dwell," Col. i. 19; and that "for us," that we might know whither to go, and where to apply for it.

Now, for the further opening up of his riches, expressed in this title, "The God of all grace," there is added one great act of grace, which doth indeed include all the rest, for we have in it the beginning and the end of the work linked together; the first effect of grace upon us, in effectual calling, and the

last accomplishment of it, in eternal glory. "Who hath called us to his eternal glory."

This calling, I conceive, doth not simply mean the design of the gospel in its general publication, wherein the outward call lies, that it holds forth, and sets before us, eternal glory as the result of grace; but refers to the real bringing of a Christian to Christ, and uniting him with Christ, and so giving him a real and firm title to glory,—such a call, as powerfully works grace in the soul, and secures glory to the soul; gives it a right to that inheritance, and fits it for it; and sometimes gives it even the evident and sweet assurance of it. This assurance, indeed, all the heirs of glory have not ordinarily within them, and scarcely any have at all times equally clear. Some travel on in a covert, cloudy day, and get home by it, having so much light as to know their way, and yet do not at all clearly see the bright and full sunshine of assurance; others have it breaking forth at times, and anon under a cloud; and some have it more constantly. But as all meet in the end, so all agree in this in the beginning, that is, in the reality of the thing; they are made unalterably sure heirs of it, in their effectual calling.

And by this the apostle advances his petition for their support, and establishment, and advancement in the way of grace. The way of our calling to so high and happy a state, did we apply our thoughts more to it, would work on us, and persuade us to a more suitable temper of mind and course of life; would give us more noble and sublime thoughts, and ways above the world; and the stronger were our persuasion of it, the more strongly should we be thus persuaded by it. And as it would thus

prevail with us, so might we use it to prevail with God for all needful grace.

All you who hear the gospel, are, in the general, called to this glory. It is told you where and how you may lay hold on it. You are told, that if you will let go your sins, and embrace Jesus Christ, this glory shall be yours. It is his purchase, and the right of it lies in him, and not elsewhere; and the way to obtain a right to him is to receive him for a Saviour, and at the same time for Lord and King; to become his subjects, and so to be made kings. This is our message to you, but you will not receive it. You give it a hearing, it may be, but do not indeed hearken to the motion; and this, of necessity, must proceed from unbelief. Were you indeed persuaded, that in coming unto Christ you were immediately not only set free from a sentence of death, which is still standing over your head while you are out of him, but withal entitled to a crown, made heirs of a kingdom, an eternal kingdom—I say, if this were believed, were it possible to slight him as the most do, and turn back the bargain, and bestow their money elsewhere upon trifles of no value, children's commodities, rattles, and painted toys? Such are your greatest projects, even for earthly kingdoms, in respect of Christ, and this glory provided in him. How wonderful is it that where this happiness is daily proclaimed, and you are not only informed of it, but entreated to receive it, not only is it offered you, but pressed and urged upon you, and you say you believe the matter; yet still, the false glory and other vanities of this world amuse and entangle you, so that you close not with this rich offer of eternal glory.

But where any do close with it, it is indeed by a

call that goes deeper than the ear, a word spoken home to within, a touch of the Spirit of God upon the heart, which hath a magnetic virtue to draw it, so that it cannot choose but follow, and yet chooses it most freely and sweetly; doth most gladly open to let in Jesus Christ and his sweet government upon his own terms, takes him and all the reproaches and troubles that can come with him. And well it may, seeing, beyond a little passing trouble, abiding, eternal glory.

The state to which a Christian is called, is not a poor and sad estate, as the world judges; it is to no less than "eternal glory." The world think it strange to see the believer abridge himself in the delights of sin, their common pursuits and eager graspings after gains, or honours, or pleasures of sense; but they know not the infinite gain that he hath made, in that he hath exchanged this dross for down-weight of pure gold. The world see what the Christian leaves, but they see not what he comes to, what his new purchase is, in another place; they see what he suffers, but not what he expects, and shall attain at the end of those sufferings, which shall shortly end. But he, knowing well upon what conditions all these things run, may well say, *Non magna relinquo, magna sequor*—"How small is what I forsake! how great that which I follow after!"

It is glory, eternal glory, "His eternal glory," true, real glory. All here that is so named, is no more than a name, a shadow of glory; it cannot endure the balance, but is found too light, as was said of a great monarch, Dan. v., and even many principalities and provinces, put into the scale one after another, still add no more weight: yea, possibly,

as a late political writer wittily observes of a certain monarch, "The more kingdoms you cast in, the scale is still the lighter." Men are naturally desirous of glory, and gape after it; but they are naturally ignorant of the true nature and place of it: they seek it where it is not, and, as Solomon says of riches, "set their hearts on that which is not," Prov. xxiii. 5, hath no subsistence or reality. But the glory above is true, real glory, and bears weight, and so bears aright the name of glory, the term for which in the Hebrew [Kebud] signifies *weight;* and the apostle's expression seems to allude to that sense: speaking of this same glory to come, he calls it "a far more excellent weight of glory," 2 Cor. iv. 17. It weighs down all labour and sufferings in the way, so far as that they are not once worth the speaking of in respect of it. It is the hyperbole, *καθ' ὑπερβολὴν εἰς ὑπερβολὴν*. Other glory is over-spoken, but this glory is over-glorious to be duly spoken: it exceeds and rises above all that can be spoken of it.

"Eternal." Oh, that adds much! Men would have more reason so to affect and pursue the glory of the present world, such as it is, if it were lasting, if it stayed with them when they have caught it, and they stayed with it to enjoy it. But how soon do they part! They pass away, and the glory passes away, both as smoke. Our life itself is as a vapour. And as for all the pomp and magnificence of those that have the greatest outward glory, and make the fairest show, it is but a show, a pageant that goes through the street, and is seen no more. But this hath length of days with it—"eternal glory." Oh, a thought of that swallows up all the grandeur of the world, and the noise of

reckoning years and ages. Had one man continued, from the creation to the end of the world, at the top of earthly dignity and glory, admired by all, yet at the end, everlasting oblivion being the close, what a nothing were it to "eternal glory!" But, alas! we cannot be brought to believe, and deeply to take the impression of eternity; and this is our undoing.

"By Jesus Christ." Your portion, while out of him, was eternal shame and misery, but *by* him, it is even all glory. And this hath in it likewise an evidence of the greatness of his glory; it can be no small estate, which the blood of the Son of God was let out to purchase.

"His glory." It is that which he gives, and gives as his choicest of all, to his chosen, his children. And if there be any thing here that hath delight or worth, in the things which he gives in common even to his enemies; if there be such a world and such a variety of good things for them that hate him, oh, how excellent must those things be which he hath reserved for his friends, for those he loves, and causes to love him!

As it is his gift, so it is indeed himself; the beholding and enjoying of himself. This we cannot now conceive. But, oh, that blessed day when the soul shall be full of God, shall be satisfied and ravished with full vision! Should we not admire that such a condition is provided for man, wretched sinful man? "Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" Psa. viii. 3. And is it provided for me, as wretched as any who are left and fallen short of this glory? a base worm taken out of the mire, and washed in the blood of Christ, and within awhile

set to shine in glory without sin! Oh, the wonder of this! How should it excite us to praise, when we think of such a one there, who will bring us up in the way to this crown! How will this hope sweeten the short sufferings of this life! And death itself, which is otherwise the bitterest in itself, is most of all sweetened by this, as being nearest it, and setting us into it. What though thou art poor, diseased, and despised here! Oh, consider what is there, how worthy the affection, worthy the earnest eye and fixed look of an heir of this glory! What can he either desire or fear, whose heart is thus deeply fixed? Who would refuse this other clause, "to suffer awhile," a little while, any thing outward or inward which he thinks fit? How soon shall all this be overpast, and then overpaid in the very entry, at the beginning of this glory that shall never end!

Ver. 11. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

They know little of their own wants and emptiness, who are not much in prayer: and they know little of the greatness and goodness of God, who are not much in praises. The humble Christian hath a heart in some measure framed to both. He hath within him the best schoolmaster, who teaches him how to pray, and how to praise, and makes him delight in the exercise of them both.

The apostle, having added prayer to his doctrine, adds here, you see, praise to his prayer. "To him be glory and dominion for ever."

The living praises of God spring from much holy affection, and that affection springs from a divine light in the understanding. So says the psalmist,

"Sing ye praises with understanding," or "You that have understanding," Psa. xlvii. 7. It is a spiritual knowledge of God, that sets the soul in tune for his praises, and therefore the most can bear no part in this song: they mistune it quite, through their ignorance of God, and unacquaintance with him. Praise is unseemly in the mouth of fools: they spoil and mistune it.

Observe, 1. The thing ascribed. 2. The term or endurance of it. The former is expressed in two words: "glory and power." Glory, that is, the shining forth of his dignity, the knowledge and acknowledgment of it by his creatures; that his excellency may be confessed and praised, his name exalted; that service and homage may be done to him: which all add nothing to him; for how can that be? But as it is the duty of such creatures as he hath fitted for it to render praise to him, so it is their happiness. All created things, indeed, declare and speak his glory: the heavens sound it forth, and the earth and sea resound and echo it back. But his reasonable creatures hath he peculiarly framed, both to take notice of his glory in all the rest, and to return it from and for all the rest, in a more express and lively way.

And in this lower world it is man alone that is made capable of observing the glory of God, and of offering him praises. He expresses it well, who calls man "the world's high priest:" all the creatures bring their oblations of praise to him, to offer up for them and for himself, for whose use and comfort they are made. The light and motion of the heavens, and all the variety of creatures below them, speak this to man—He that made us and you, and made us for you, is great, and wise, and worthy to be

praised. And you are better able to say this than we; therefore praise him on our behalf, and on your own. Oh! he is great and mighty, he is the Lord our Maker.

"Power" here expresses not only ability, but authority and royal sovereignty; that, as he can do all things, he rules and governs all things, is King of all the world, Lord paramount. All hold their crowns of him, and "the shields of the earth belong unto God; he is greatly exalted," Psa. xlvii. 9. He disposes of states and kingdoms at his pleasure, establisheth or changeth, turns and overturns, as seems him good; and hath not only might, but right to do so. He is the Most High, ruling in the kingdoms of the children of men, and giving them to whomsoever he will, Dan. iv. 32; pouring contempt upon princes when they contemn his power.

The term of this glory is "for ever." Even in the short life of man, men who are raised very high in place and popular esteem, may, and often do, outlive their own glory. But the glory of God lasteth as long as himself, for he is unchangeable: his throne is for ever, and his wrath for ever, and his mercy for ever, and therefore his glory for ever.

Reflection 1. Is it not to be lamented, that God is so little glorified and praised? that the earth, being so full of his goodness, is so empty of his praise from those who enjoy and live upon it?

How far are the greatest part from making this their great work, to exalt God, and ascribe power and glory to his name! So far, that all their ways are his dishonour: they seek to advance and raise themselves, to serve their own lusts and pleasures, while they are altogether mindless of his glory.

Yea, the apostle's complaint holds good against us all; we are seeking our own things, and none the things of the Lord Jesus Christ, Phil. ii. 21. It is true, some exceptions there are; but, as his meaning is, they are so few that they are, as it were, drowned and smothered in the crowd of self-seekers, so that they appear not. After all the judgments of God upon us, how do luxury and excess, uncleanness, and all kinds of profaneness, still outdare the very light of the gospel, and the rule of holiness shining in it! Scarcely any thing is a matter of common shame and scorn, but the "power of godliness;" turning, indeed, our true glory into shame, and glorying in that which is indeed our shame. Holiness is not only our truest glory, but that wherein the ever-glorious God doth especially glory. He hath made known himself particularly by that name, "The holy God;" and the express style of his glorious praises uttered by seraphims is, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory," Isa. vi. 3.

Instead of sanctifying and glorifying this holy name, how doth the language of hell, oaths and curses, abound in our streets and houses! How is that blessed name, which angels are blessing and praising, abused by base worms! Again, notwithstanding all the mercies multiplied upon us in this land, where are our praises, our songs of deliverance, our ascribing glory and power to our God, who hath prevented us with loving-kindness and tender mercies; hath removed the strokes of his hand, and made cities and villages populous again, that were left desolate without inhabitants?

Oh, why do we not stir up our hearts, and one another, to extol the name of our God, and say,

"Give unto the Lord glory and strength; give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name?" Have we not seen the pride and glory of all flesh stained and abased? Were there ever affairs and times that more discovered the folly and weakness of men, and the wisdom and power of God? Oh that our hearts were set to magnify him, according to that word so often repeated in Psa. cvii., "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, for his wonderful works to the children of men!"

Reflection 2. But what wonder is it that the Lord loses the revenue of his praises at the hands of the common ungodly world, when even his own people fall so far behind it as usually they do! "The dead cannot praise him;" but that those whom he hath quickened by his Spirit, should yet be so surprised with deadness and dulness as to this exercise of exalting God, this is very strange. For help of this, take the three following directions:

Direction I. We should seek after a fit temper, and labour to have our hearts brought to a due disposition for his praises. And in this view,—

1. See that they be spiritual. All spiritual services require that, but this service most, as being indeed the most spiritual of all. Affection to the things of this earth draws down the soul, and makes it so low set that it cannot rise to the height of a song of praise; and thus, if we observed ourselves, we should find, that when we let our hearts fall and entangle themselves in any inferior desires and delights, as they are unfitted generally for holy things, so, especially, for the praises of our holy God. Creature loves debase the soul, and turn it to earth, and praise is altogether heavenly.

2. Seek a heart purified from self-love, and pos-

sessed with the love of God. The heart which is ruled by its own interest is scarcely ever content, still subject to new disquiet. Self is a vexing thing, for all things do not readily suit our humours and wills, and the least touch that is wrong to a selfish mind distempers it, and disrelishes all the good things about it. A childish condition it is, if crossed but in a toy, to throw away all. Whence are our frequent frettings and grumblings, and why is it that we can drown a hundred high favours in one little displeasure, so that still our finger is upon that string, and there is more malecontent and repining for one little cross, than praises for all the mercies we have received? Is not this evidently from the self-love that abounds in us? Whereas, were the love of God predominant in us, we should love his doings and disposals, and bless his name in all. Whatsoever were his will, would, in that view, be amiable and sweet to us, however in itself harsh and unpleasant. Thus should we say in all: This is the will and the hand of my Father, who doth all things wisely and well; blessed be his name!

The soul thus framed, would praise in the deeps of troubles; not only in outward afflictions, but in the saddest inward condition, it would be still extolling God, and saying, However he deal with me, he is worthy to be loved and praised. He is great and holy, he is good and gracious; and whatsoever be his way and thoughts towards me, I wish him glory. If he will be pleased to give me light and refreshment, blessed be he; and if he will have me to be in darkness again, blessed be he, glory to his name! Yea, what though he should utterly reject me, is he not for that to be accounted infinitely merciful in the saving of others? Must he cease to be praiseworthy

for my sake? If he condemn, yet he is to be praised, being merciful to so many others: yea, even in so dealing with me, he is to be praised, for in that he is just.

Thus would pure love reason for him, and render praise to him. But our ordinary way is most untoward and unbeseeming his creatures, even the best of them, much more such worms as we are; that things must rather be to our mind than his, and we must either have all our will, or else, for our part, he shall have none of his praises.

3. Labour for that which on these two will follow, a "fixed heart." If it be refined from creature-love, and self-love, spirituality and love of God will fix it; and then shall it be fit to praise, which an unstable, uncomposed heart can never be, any more than an instrument can be harmonious and fit to play on, that hath loose pins, still slipping and letting down the strings, pins that never fasten. And thus are the most: they cannot fix to Divine thoughts, to consider God, to behold and admire his excellency and goodness, and his free love. Oh, that happy word of David, worthy to be twice repeated! When shall we say it? "O God, my heart is fixed:" well might he add, "I will sing and give praise," Psa. lvii. 7. Oh, that we would pray much that he would fix our hearts, and then, he having fixed them, we should praise him much.

Direction II. If any due disposition be once attained for praises, then must the heart, so disposed, be set to study the matter of praises.

And, 1. Study the infinite excellency of God in himself; of which though we know little, yet this we know, and should consider it, that it is far beyond what all the creatures and all his works are able to

testify of him; that he transcends all we can speak, or hear, or know of him. 2. Look on him in his works. Can we behold the vast heavens above, or the firm earth beneath us, or all the variety of his works in both, without holy wonder excited in us, and that stirring us up to sing praises? Oh, his greatness, and might, and wisdom shining in these! "Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all," Psa. civ. 24. But above all, that work, that marvel of his works, the sending of his Son forth of his bosom. This is the mystery which the apostles do so much magnify in their writings, which is so much magnified in this Epistle, and which forms the chief incentive to the ascription of praise with which it closes. This praise looks particularly back to the style in the prayer, "The God of all grace, who hath called us to his eternal glory by Jesus Christ." So many other mercies are not to be forgotten, but chiefly is he to be praised for that choicest of mercies. "To his glory, who hath called us to his glory." Then, look through the work of saving his chosen, so redeemed by the blood of his Son. His maintaining his own work in them against all surrounding enemies and oppositions, the advancing of it in the midst of them, and even by means of those oppositions, and bringing them safe to glory; that perfecting and establishment, as in the foregoing words. It is this which so affects the apostle in the very entry of this Epistle, that there he must break forth into praise: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead," chap. i. ver. 3. He begins there in praise, and here he ends in it, and so

encloses all within that Divine circle. And, as we consider these things in general, so should we also reflect on his particular dealing with us, his good providence both in spirituals and temporals. Would we search, oh! what a surcharge of innumerable mercies should each of us find! And were we better acquainted with the Holy Scriptures, had we more our delight in them, they would acquaint us better with all these things, and give us light to see them, and warm our hearts, and excite them to his praises, who is the God of all our mercies.

Direction III. The heart being somewhat disposed to praise, and then studying the matter of it, should be applied actually to render praise. And in order to this, we must be careful, 1. To aim at God in all, which is continued praise; to eye his glory in every thing, and chiefly to desire as our great end, that his name may be exalted. This is the "excellent way" indeed. Whereas most are either wholly for their self-ends, or often squinting out to them. That soul is most noble, which singly and fixedly aims at exalting God, and seeks to have this stamp on all it speaks, and does, and desires—All to the greater glory of my God. 2. To abound in the express and solemn return of praise this way. "To him be glory," not a customary dead saying of it over, as it is usual with us, but the heart offering it up. What is so pure and high as this exercise, the praises of the ever-glorious Deity? What is heaven but these? And were it not best, as we can, to begin it here, and long to be there, where it shall never end? "To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

Ver. 12. By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand.
13. The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son.
14. Greet ye one another with a kiss of charity. Peace be with you all that are in Christ Jesus. Amen.

This is a kind of postscript, and contains a testimony of the bearer, and the apostolic form of saluting. Withal, the apostle expresses the measure of his writing, that it was "brief," and the end of it, "that it was to testify the true grace of God." And this is, indeed, the end of our preaching, and we ought each to seek it by the word, and by mutual exhortations: and sometimes a few words may avail much to this purpose, to our hearty establishment in the faith. And not only are we to believe, but to remember that we have the best of it; that there is truth in our hopes, and they shall not deceive us. They are no fancy, as the world thinks, "but the true grace of God;" yea, when all things else shall vanish, their truth shall most appear in their full accomplishment.

The entertainment and increase of Christian love, of due esteem one of another, and affection one to another, is no matter of empty compliment, but is the very stamp and badge of Jesus Christ upon his followers; it is, therefore, most carefully to be preserved entire, and unhappy are they that do by any means willingly break it. Oh, let us beware of doing so, and "follow peace," even when it seems to fly from us!

This peace that is the portion of those in Christ, is indeed within them, and with God. But through him it is likewise "one with another," and in that

notion it is to be desired and wished jointly with the other.

They that are in Christ are the only children and heirs of true peace. Others may dream of it, and have a false peace for a time, and wicked men may wish it to themselves and one another; but it is a most vain hope, and will come to nought. But to wish it to them that are in Christ hath good ground; for all solid peace is founded on him, and flows from him. "Now, the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds, through Jesus Christ." Amen.

THE END.

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